

d20
system

FAST FORWARD
ENTERTAINMENT

Swords of Power



SWORDS OF POWER

James M. Ward: Singing Sword of Camelot, Talking Sword of Strength, Telepathic Blade of Dragonkind, Dragonheart Blade, Sword of Challenge, Sword of Justice, Contesting Sword, Sword of Death, Anklesplitter, Sword of the Elf Lord, Human Ender, Rogue's Dagger, Ren's Dagger of Flying, Sword of the Fighter, Sword of the Barbarian, Paladin's Questing Sword, Sword of the Ranger, Fey Sword of the Bard, Sword of the Rogue, Elemental Blade of the South, Blade of the North, Elemental Blade of the East, Dwarven Blade of the West, Dragonkind City Blade, Takanel, Wizard Ren's Knife, Sorcerer Atum-Sept's Knife, Thief's Knife, Heartstopper

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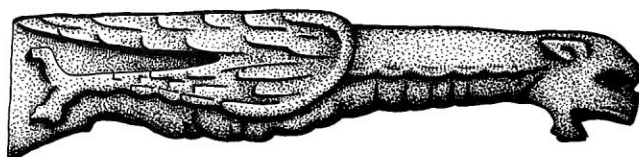
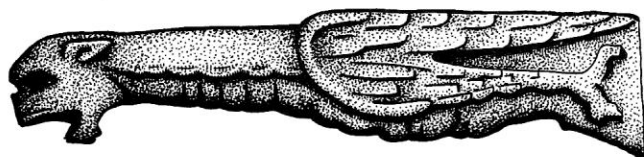
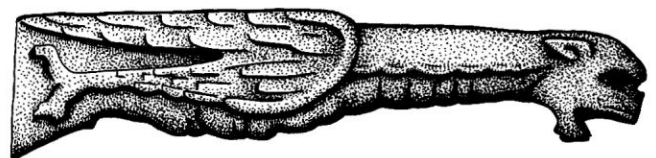
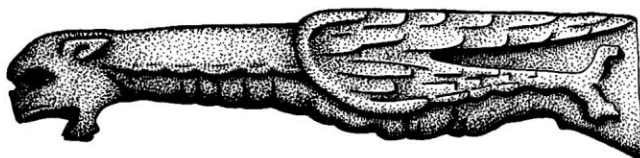


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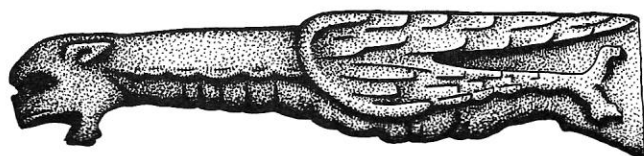
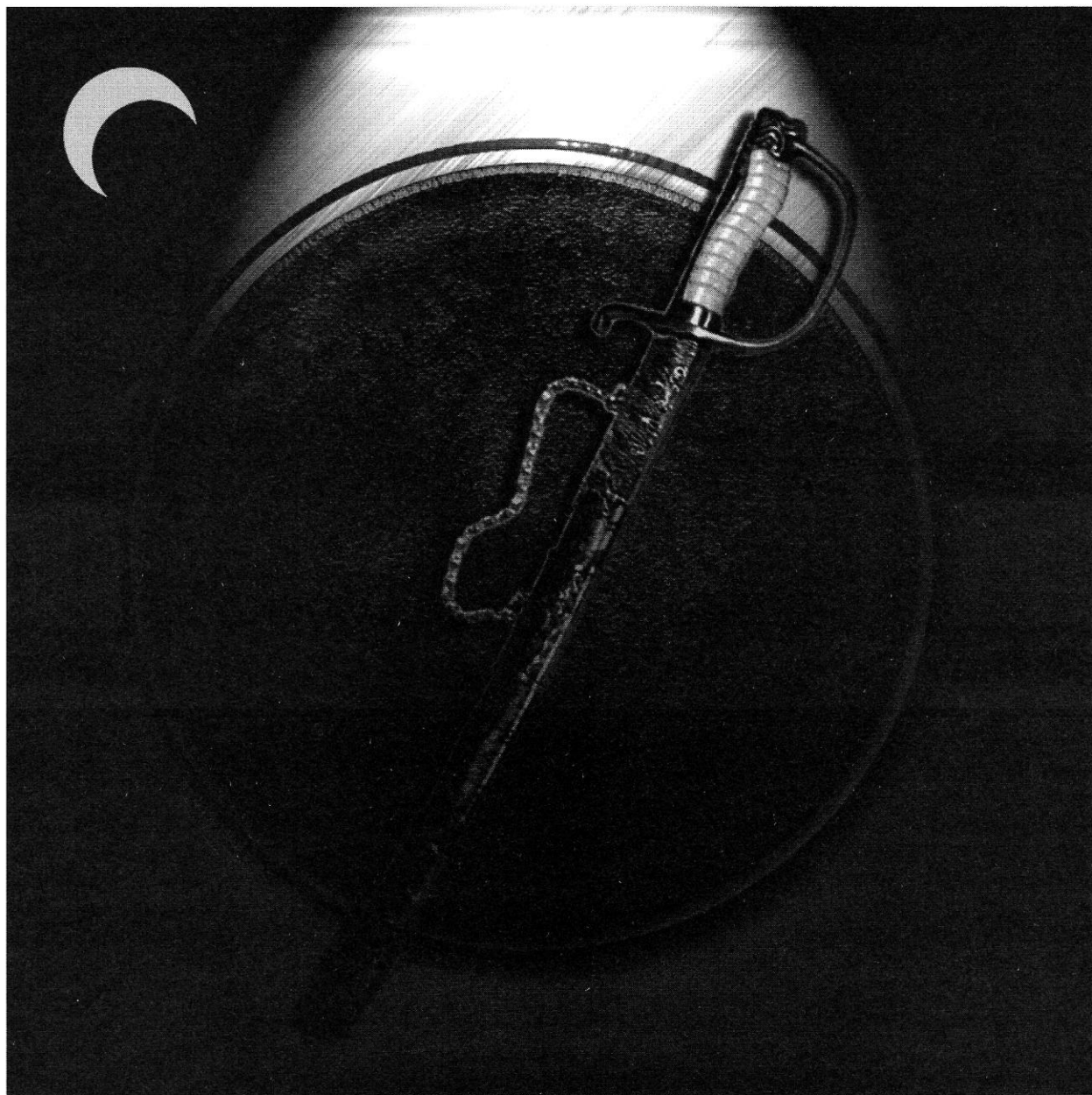
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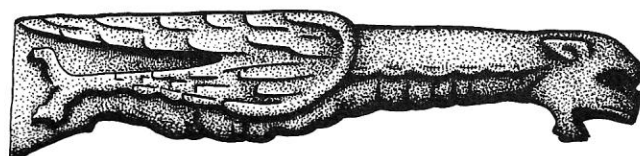


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PREFACE

Excalibur, Caladbolg, the Sword of Strange Hangings, and all the magnificent blades from your favorite fantasy literature.

Magical swords lie at the heart of all great fantasy literature. Any truly magnificent blade emerges from fantastic circumstances, steeped in legend appropriate to its stature, praised and revered by the denizens of its world, jealously guarded by its owners, greedily sought by those who crave its power.

So why, then, has role-playing reduced magical swords to just so much more crappy treasure?

"Let's see. The dead trolls were carrying a hundred gold coins, a thousand silver coins, and a sword plus one."

"Another sword plus one! Just throw it on the pile with the rest of them!"

Now that's high fantasy!

Frankly, I've always felt that too little attention was given to the nobility, the majesty of fantasy role-playing worlds. Nothing suffers more than treasure, usually counted up for its experience point value, then either heaped with the rest or ignored entirely. Ho hum. Boring treasure in a boring universe using boring rules designed to keep it all that way.

It's just not for me.

With this book, *Swords of Power*, and its companion volumes, *Rings of Power* and *Wondrous Items of Power*, we're breaking the mold of fantastic treasure in d20 System games. No longer lumps of nondescript magical bric-a-brac, not just another magical Big Mac churned out by an uncaring sorcerous bureaucracy, our magical swords have depth, history, purpose, and real game value.

When I'm playing I don't want a magical item with no particular history. Was it just cranked out by some smith and wizard in some sort of medieval assembly line. How dull! If all it does is adjust the game stats by a point or two, just count me out. Give me the reasons, the major players, the hows and the whys.

Who cares who made your magical sword? Well, in anything but a cookie-cutter, mass produced fantasy universe they just don't go around making magical swords for no reason. Some plot is afoot, some deed must be done, some quest must be fulfilled. Knowing what that reason was helps you understand the people who put the effort into the sword's creation. Were they operating in secret or out in the open? Was there one creator or a team of many? Were they a united front, or was there a traitor in their midst? Who were their friends? Who were their

enemies? Was the sword created eons ago or just in the last few weeks? Most importantly, do any of their circumstances carry over into the present time? The more of this type of information you have, the more it can be applied to the unfolding role-playing situations.

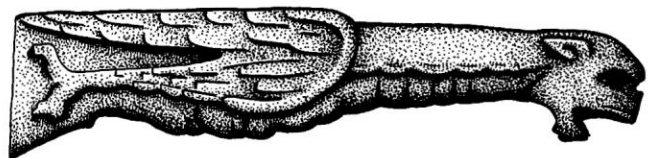
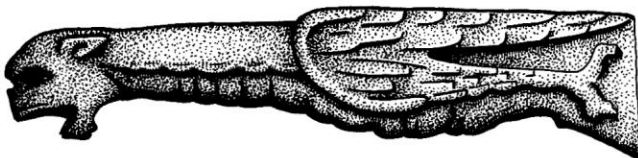
What does it matter where the sword's been since it was created? Important magical items have owners and they have friends, enemies, influence, etc. The covetous seek out magical swords, and they have their allies and enemies, as well. Was the original creator also the first owner, or was the sword made by one person for use by another? Does that person still have it, or if not, why? Did he lose it, have it taken away, or did the sword will itself away? Was it lost, and if so, for how long? Did other people use it in the meantime, or did it lie somewhere forgotten? Is there a family line with a right to own the sword? Was it willed to another or to a kingdom or city? Are there people who want to find it? Are there others who want to destroy it?

What does the sword's current circumstance have to do with anything? That's the most important element of all—the situation that can be expected when characters in the campaign find the sword in the first place. Is it free for the taking, or heavily protected? Does someone own it, or is it in the treasure hoard of some nasty monster? Do you have to fight the present owner to secure it, in which case you have to face the weapon's powers before you can use them to your own advantage?

So the next time your game master tells you you've found a sword plus one, don't let him off the hook so easily! Demand compelling information. Have your character track the information in the game universe. Research the history of the sword, ask every enchanter you can find, consult every weaponsmith and armorer, every chronicler of heraldry and forgotten deeds. Force that game master to hand over the sword's history, its purpose, and make it an integral part of the unfolding story. Make him broaden his approach to the game universe and the flavor of a medieval fantasy setting.

That's basically what we were after with this book and its companion volumes. While role-playing enjoys a resurgence, we need to emphasize the fantasy. Tear down the walls of the bland, flavorless universes out there. It's easy to do. Demand better and you'll receive it.

Timothy Brown
December, 2001



INTRODUCTION

Swords of Power is the second in a trilogy of companion volumes, the first being *Rings of Power* and the third *Wondrous Items of Power*. Each book is committed to taking one category of d20 System magical items and making it markedly more fantastic by including extensive history and detail; every magical item becomes more than mere treasure; it becomes the focus of genuine adventure.

The Weapons

Swords of Power presents 105 swords, knives, and daggers for d20 System play. The complete description of each is divided into two sections.

The first gives a compelling story of the sword's creation, subsequent use, present situation, importance, or any combination thereof. Each weapon's story is presented in its own format (prose, dialogue, excerpts from journals, etc.), whatever is best suited to telling its tale. Along with each prose description is an accurate illustration of the weapon, identical to the actual weapon on which it is based. (See "Owning a Sword of Power," below.)

Later, in a separate section at the back of the volume, are the sword's game statistics, accounting for combat bonuses, abilities common to magical weapons (such as intelligence, communication, ego, and purpose, if any), and any special powers.

Finally, statistics are given for characters, monsters, or other elements important to the weapon's present situation. Present owners or guardians are commonly listed, along with the statistics of its seekers or enemies, their traps and barriers, etc. Everything the game master requires to bring the sword into his d20 System campaign is carefully described.

Swords of Power in Your Campaign

The weapons presented in this book are not the garden variety magical swords. They all have unique circumstances and powers that set them apart from those simply rolled up on the random treasure tables. How and when to introduce them into your campaign is key to getting the most out of this book for your game.

Integrating the Fantastic Settings: The prose section for each sword is set in its own fantasy environment. These have been kept as 'standard' as possible within the scope of the d20 System and its most common elements. The settings are easily blended into any standard fantasy role-playing game setting.

Still, the actual names of places, characters, races,

deities, etc., will not match your campaign precisely. You may want to adjust these to place each weapon directly into your campaign. For instance, a sword in this book that is said to be in the city of Dragonkind can easily be adjusted to be in some important city of your campaign world, instead.

Alternately, since most campaign worlds are not entirely 'mapped out,' you can place these weapons in far-away or as-yet-unmapped portions of your world. Beyond that, the swords might be separated from your campaign world by the very planes themselves; complex, dangerous planar travel may be necessary to bring the two together.

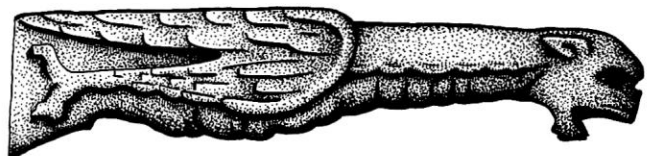
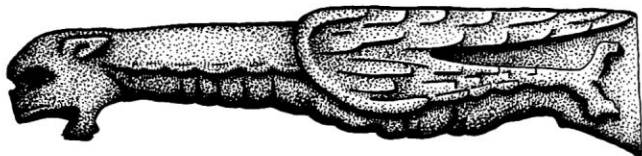
Introducing of Swords of Power: You can toss these swords into your campaign by a variety of means. It may be as simple as handing out one of these weapons as treasure the next time your characters come across a common sword plus one. However, the tools are given here for you to be much more subtle about it.

Read the background and familiarize yourself with the characters' and weapon's present situation. If the weapon is presently held by a character, introduce that character slowly into the campaign; mention him as a distant non-player character of some importance or reputation, or give him a minor role in your present adventure, with or without mentioning the weapon at all. Your player characters might know of the sword's owner for days or even years before they learn he carries or protects such a magnificent magical weapon. If the weapon is more deadly against a particular race, place rumors among their kind about the hated weapon's existence and whereabouts. Goblins, for instance, probably know all about the dreaded sword Goblinslayer, whispering to one another about the foul steel blade in the dark, frightening their children with tales of its wickedness. If the sword has pursuers, let them cross paths with the player characters in other adventures, maybe years before the sword is found.

Introducing these weapons slowly makes the best use of the background and statistics for your campaign.

Owning a Sword of Power

Every weapon presented in *Swords of Power* is based on a real sword, knife, or dagger that you can own. Visit www.FastForwardGames.com for a complete list of all these superbly crafted weapons and ordering information. It's one thing for your character to possess a powerful magical sword, but quite another to actually show up for the game with the weapon in hand!



Sword of Magnificence

"All right, class. Settle down, now. Put those wands back in their cabinet and take your seats. We have a lot to cover today." The wise professor of sorcerers lifted his bushy brow in that special way that brooked no misbehavior. Chatter ceased instantly as gray-robed initiates shuffled to their desks, folding arms respectfully in front of them and giving their undivided attention to their teacher. At the wizards college, virtually humming with scrying magic and magical watchdogs of all manner, mischief seldom went unnoticed, so few students engaged in it. The professor glanced quickly from face to face, and, satisfied order was firmly established, unrolled his scroll on the cluttered table before him, sending a sleeping black kitten scurrying for cover behind a dim crystal ball.

"As you know from the last lecture, our lesson today continues the discussion of transmuted materials and their effect on ethereal composition." He paused to survey the room for any betrayal of utter boredom, something they all felt, he was sure, but was pleased to see none displayed outwardly. "But ... I won't be making that lecture today." He let the scroll roll itself back up and pinched the bridge of his nose, eyes closed in an uncharacteristically serious manner. "No, young initiates, there are events afoot that you must be made aware of, things that may change all our lives, soon and forever." He glanced from face to face, each stunned into complete and serious attention. "Yes, the time has come to make you all aware ... but this story begins long ago."

"I know you have not studied creation wizardry just yet, but who among you can tell me the three forces of nature that acted upon the void to create the prime material plane? Anyone?" So young, the professor thought to himself. So inexperienced. "Matter, consciousness, and magic, in that order to be precise. This is an especially complicated subject, usually for fifth-year students, but I'll have to give you the basics. Essentially, you see, matter existed for all eternity and will continue to exist ... that's an important point, so don't forget it quickly. Matter achieved consciousness as a byproduct of the gods' separation into the factions of good and evil ... that's pretty complicated, too, so just take my word for it for now. All matter has consciousness, not just animals and men, but even rocks and plants, though their consciousness is difficult to detect. All matter thinks and feels, and in many ways fundamental magic is an appeal to that consciousness to take action one way or another."

Stunned, blank faces stared back at him.

"Look, no need to take notes on this. There won't be time for that, so just listen." Quills went down and eyes turned up.

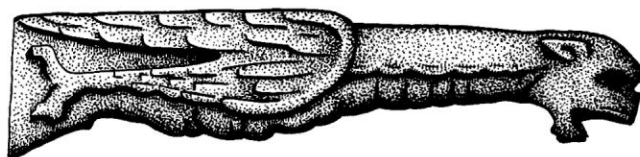
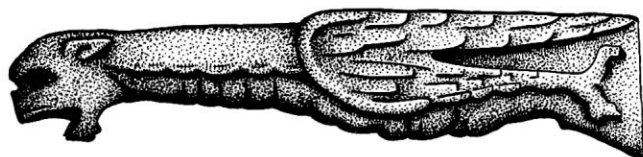
"Good. The first largest portion of that conscious matter was corrupted by demons after the great Heresy of the Elder Twins - that's a fourth-year course - and it exploded, sending enormous bits of matter in all directions. The smallest of these were the size of mountains, the largest bigger than a dozen worlds!" Eyes wide, he spread his arms in futile gesture. "They raced away from the enormous explosion at tremendous speeds. One of these was an enormous chunk of elementally pure iron that the dwarves came to call Kurud-khum, or World Splitter. It constituted most of the iron in the prime material plane and in the purest form. The dwarves recognized its importance and how we would one day need it to fashion weapons against the demonic hordes. So, they decided to retrieve it with the help of an enormous air elemental named Whispnathan. Interestingly, he was a cousin of a djinni maiden who ... oh, that's not really important, so we'll skip that."

"Anyway, Whispnathan gathered in his cloud-like arms a small force of the bravest dwarves, including the great-great-grandfather of Quafin of Stoneshoulder! They set off after World Splitter that was by then so far away that even with the speed of a racing air elemental it took them half a lifetime to catch up to it. The trouble was, dwarves know everything about iron but very little about air elementals. When Whispnathan reached out and touched the pure iron World Splitter froze instantly and shattered into a million tiny shards. Now these passed through his airy body easily but, unfortunately, sliced through her dwarven passengers like a rain of arrows, slaying them all. So, World Splitter was lost to the dwarves and its bits raced on through the void, falling here and there on other worlds over the millennia."

"So, remember all that for a moment: all those iron shards spread all over creation." The professor stopped to take a breath and survey his students. Still paying attention, he saw. Good, he had not lost them yet.

"Okay, now you need to know something of the Sprite's Grove and the Debt of Prince Alvion. Ah, I see some of you have heard of that, eh? Good! That will help. Then you know of the legend of the Sprite's Grove - not the saucy tale of debauchery told around the docks and taverns, but the actual Sprite's Grove in the forest primeval. These were among the first denizens of our world that manipulated magic freely and dominated their realm, small though it was. The sprites built great cities and empires, fought wars, and delved into sorcery, all beneath the shadow of the mighty forest canopy."

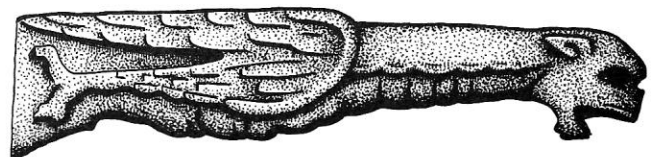
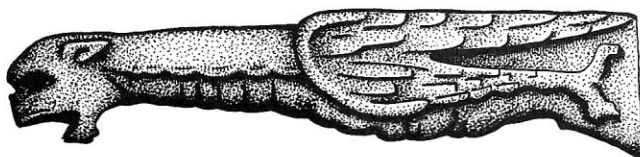
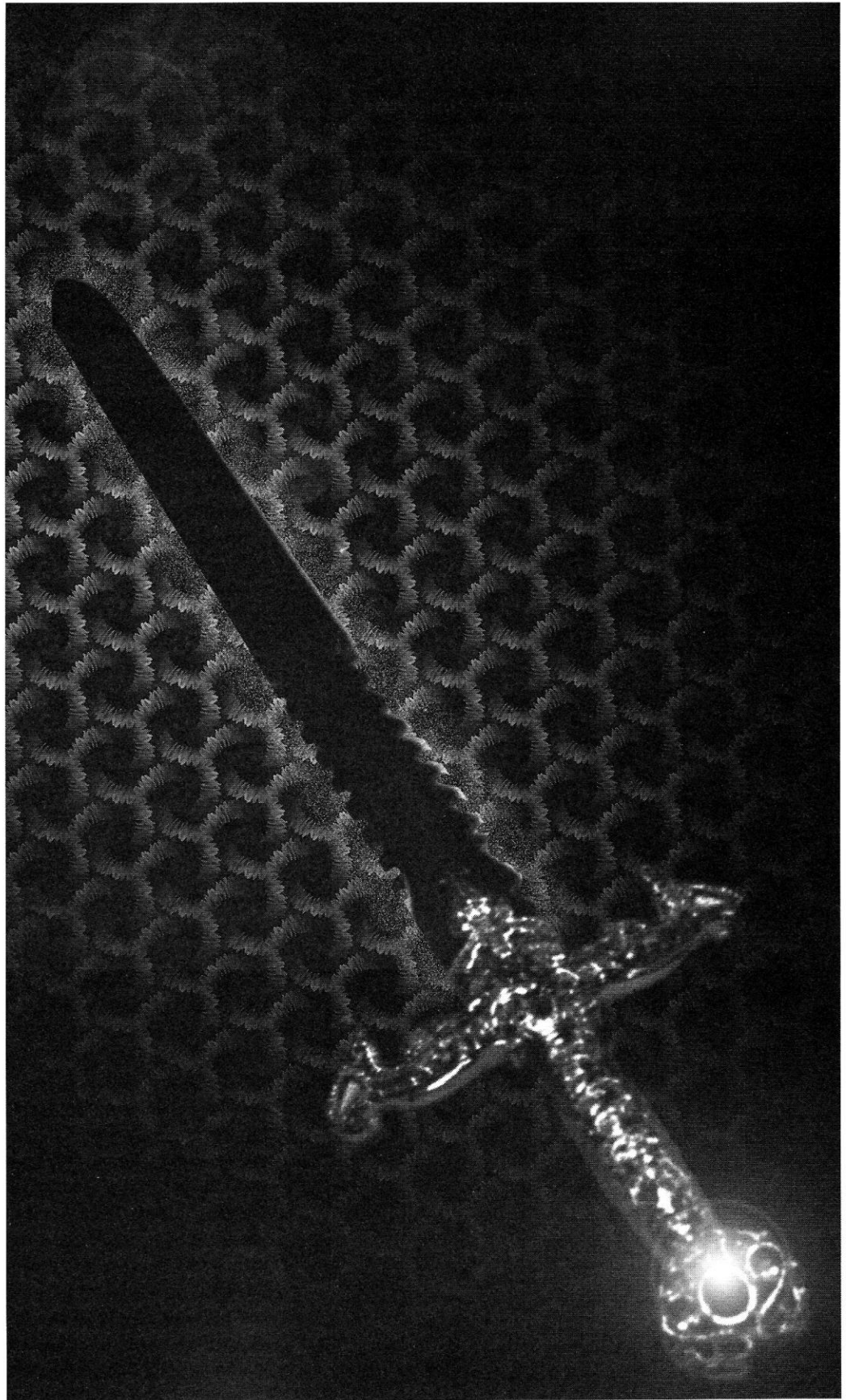
"In the waning years of their supremacy, however, humans ventured onto the scene, coming from the hinterlands into their woods as hunters and, frankly, as ruffians and brigands. These were the most savage of men, clad in simple skins and fighting with clubs, migrating with the



herds of elk or the seasons because they knew nothing of agriculture or masonry.

Individually, when these brutes blundered in among the sprites they were easily turned back, frightened, or what have you, but they became increasingly more troublesome when they migrated in their thousands."

"Nippselweed, an elder among the sprites at the time, declared there must be an end to the brutish human menace, one that would leave the woods in peace. She proposed giving some mastery of magic to a few humans and encouraging them to settle on the fringes of the sprite woodlands. These humans, she imagined, would settle to a more civilized condition of life and themselves keep their less civilized brethren at a safe distance. Nippselweed demonstrated that she had done this very thing in secret, and showed off a family group of magically literate humans. They had given up their warlike ways to build homes and lives. Her argument was convincing, especially with the evidence she presented, and



the sprites agreed to try it on a much larger scale."

"Of course, the results were disastrous. In no time at all the magically gifted humans turned on the others to dominate and enslave them. Rather than reside in harmony with the sprites they became greedy for more magic and hunted them down in their woodland homes. The sprites were scattered, as you know, and the humans, well, they eventually became us."

"So, then, centuries after that but still many centuries ago Prince Alvion was next in line to rule the entire Empire. We humans had grown beyond savagery, but not much. The Prince was still young enough to engage in much travel and self-indulgence. One fateful night his carriage overturned in a storm and he found himself drenched and alone with nothing but a dagger to fend off a pack of dire wolves. His back against a tree, he braced himself for the final lunge of a wolf's jaws around his throat when he heard a faint tinkling bell in his ears. The wolves vanished into the night and the Prince made the acquaintance of Berryfin, a lone sprite still wandering the world after so many years out of the grove. Berryfin had simply asked the dire wolves to leave and they did. Prince Alvion was much impressed and befriended the generous sprite. He recognized his great debt and offered to do anything for Berryfin, but the sprite never named a price. For many years Berryfin was the Prince's constant companion, advising him on matters of love and state, tossing a little magic here or there to make the Prince's life a bit more enchanted."

"But, on the very day the old king died and Alvion took the crown for his own, Berryfin called in his marker. 'Alvion,' he said, 'I have never once asked a return favor for saving you from the wolves. Now, though, I have one wish that the sprites be allowed to gather among humans and even have a representative on your Learned Council. Our time of wandering must be at an end.' Alvion agreed, and to this day sprites have lived among us as friends."

"And this union could not have come at a better time. Not two years later an expedition returned from the ice-capped northern mountains with an enormous 12-foot chunk of iron dug out of a deep crater. Yes, it was a shard from World Splitter, deposited here on our world and only just discovered. Its finders thought only to sell it to the armorers for a tidy profit, but there were now ancient, learned sprites on the council who recognized it for what it was and they shared that knowledge freely. They knew that, now discovered, demons would see through the eyes of mortals. They would see the shard and would come to destroy it. It was a matter of time, the sprites knew, before an army of demons would descend on the world and scrub it clean of all living things, then haul off the shard for destruction in the fires of the Abyss."

"'This is not in any history texts' you say? Of course it is

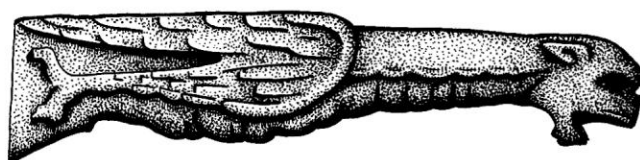
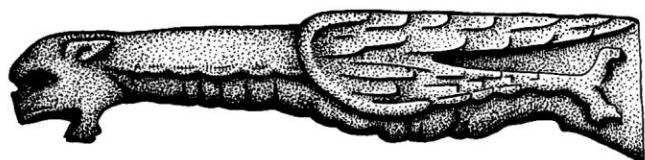
not, and soon you will know why! You will know why this obscure piece of unreported history has reared its ugly head in our time to threaten our world!"

"Now, the shard itself was not particularly useful to Alvion. Roughly one ton of pure elemental iron, it sat in the courtyard outside his lordly manor inside the fortifications of his estate, and it took many teams of oxen just to get it that far. Alvion would sit on a bench and just stare at it, contemplate it, this bit of the original universe flung so far to cause him so much grief. In time he learned to hate it. All the while, sprites and scholars delved deep into lore to gain some insight into the demonic minds that coveted it so badly, and their efforts were fruitful."

"Scrying and research revealed a single demon, Maltamidar, who was noted for seeking the various shards of World Splitter throughout the planes. While in purpose he was much like the rest of his kind, he was also reputed to be collecting, rather than destroying the shards, for some unknown devilish purpose. The sprites on the council, including Berryfin, agreed that this might be an opportunity to take the initiative, to lure opposing factions of demons to the shard simultaneously so they might fight each other rather than destroy our world. It was a risky venture, one that Alvion contemplated long and eventually accepted. But not before ordering the construction of a huge furnace against the side of the shard to melt off a bit of the pure ore for his own purposes."

"Something you may not realize, class, is that sprites and their woodland fairy kindred are quite in touch with all magical beings, both good and evil. It was, therefore, no trouble at all for them, under the direction of Berryfin, to get word out among the evil denizens of the world and outer planes that a shard existed on our world. They connived and twisted the truth, parceled out information in just the manner necessary to make the shard seem virtually unprotected, an easy prize for any demon to pluck. The sprites were especially careful to impart information to agents they knew would go straight to Maltamidar, the demon that bucked the system. The espionage was in place, and along with Alvion's armies and courts, the sprites waited."

"During that horrible period of waiting for demonic invasion, Alvion was not idle. He re fortified the capital and the royal castle at its heart, employing thousands of peasants for the hard labor of quarrying and placing stone. The army drilled relentlessly under his command, deploying all around the city to react quickly; when demons gated themselves in there would be precious little time to react. Most of all he put word out to all the lords and ladies of the empire, specifically requesting the best warriors and wizards and all the magical armaments and devices that might be useful against demonic ene-



mies. The response was overwhelming, and all manner of troops arrived at the capital, some bearing the magical heirlooms of their lords: amulets and wands, swords and armor of various enchantments. Many were quite powerful, but King Alvion feared none would stem the tide against a demonic horde."

"So, the king ordered fire put to the furnace against the iron shard. Coal-smeared smiths stoked the fires all day and through the night for week after week, but the enchanted iron refused to melt. King Alvion ordered a second furnace built, but still there was no success. Only when the nearby forests were nearly denuded of trees to make charcoal did the shard's iron yield and melt off just enough iron to forge a single weapon. The king ordered his finest armorers to fashion a single sword from it. He also ordered his entire council of sorcerers to enchant the weapon to slay demons. They set to work in a special smithy erected just for the purpose, and King Alvion would often watch it long into the night from the parapets as great blasts of sparks lit up the night with every ringing blow of the hammer."

"The demon Maltamidar arrived first, taking the guise of a simple peasant that all the wizards and sprites failed to recognize. Maltamidar, therefore, examined every bit of our fortifications and placement of troops, magical wards and weaponry. He studied long and well before he was finally discovered for what he was by a suspicious scribe; it seems he wandered too near the shard too many times. He assumed his gigantic, beastly form before gating away, and so terrible was his visage that a hundred laborers died of fright."

"On hearing the news, King Alvion commanded his artisans to redouble their efforts on the as-yet incomplete sword of shard iron. Maltamidar would return, and soon, possibly with a great host of demonic minions. In three long nights the work was completed, and King Alvion accepted the sword they had fashioned, a work of art that glowed with immense magical fire. The king declared it to be the Sword of Magnificence and bestowed knightly status on all who participated in its creation."

"And they finished none too soon, let me assure you, students. Maltamidar returned with an army of demons that descended on the fortifications. The wards placed by our wizards did much to keep them from gating into the center of the fort, but some still found treacherous ways around that magic and emerged inside regardless. The defenders were strong and valiant, but their numbers were quickly overwhelmed. Few bore arms sufficient to penetrate the demons' thick, otherworldly hides. In a matter of a few hours the only pocket of resistance left to Maltamadar was the force commanded by King Alvion

himself around the iron shard."

"The king's craftsmen had done their job well, and the magical properties of the shard's iron only lent more strength to his Sword of Magnificence. It hewed through demons as if they were ghosts until the castle and courtyard were like a butcher's floor, smeared with blood and severed flesh. King Alvion took direct command of the battle in that courtyard, ordering troops into a defensive ring, distributing reinforcements as they arrived, even setting up a reserve to help plug holes in the line where demons pressed the battle. On through the night the battle raged, lit by a thousand fires burning the castle and city to the ground. Every moment when it seemed all hope was lost the king would arrive with the Sword of Magnificence held high, and the demons retreated, cowering. By dawn the final battle was set, and King Alvion faced off against Maltamidar himself in a duel to decide the fate of a world."

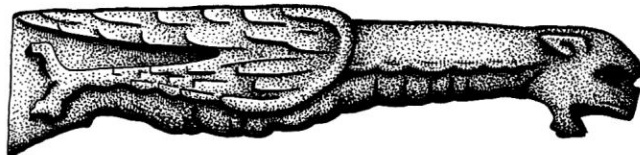
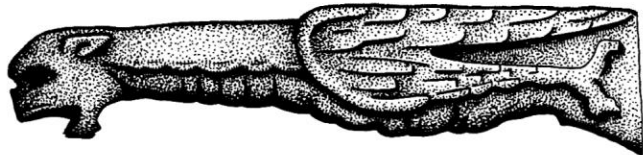
"Maltamidar's enormous claws tore right through the king's plate and mail on the first swing, leaving him cut deep across the chest and shoulder. At first the head demon appeared to be immune to the Sword of Magnificence, which turned back against his hide, and the human warriors panicked and ran. But King Alvion redoubled his efforts and raised the battle anew, eventually piercing Maltamidar through the bosom and out the other side, forcing it to gate out of existence. At that same moment, a new host of demons bent on the destruction of the iron shard arrived to battle Maltamidar's host. After a week's battle, all the demons exhausted themselves and left our world."

The professor of magic stopped to rub his temples. "The shard exists today, as you know, out in the ruins of the Old Citadel. Eventually, we have always known, demons would return to steal or destroy it, but time in the outer planes is different than what it is here. A decade to us may be but a few moments to them. But the sprites have been ever watchful, and they see a new demonic host coming even now."

"As you know, it has been centuries since our race abandoned the sword, turning its full attention to magic. This college and your presence here is testament to that achievement. But, at this moment, our magic may not be enough to push back the approaching horde. Our salvation lies in whoever has the strength of will to abandon his sorcerous teachings and wield this ..."

The professor drew an enormous blade from a sack hidden behind his table, and the Sword of Magnificence bathed the entire classroom in soft, warm light.

"Gentlemen, we are in need of a warrior."



Legacy Blade

To the honorable Scena Shaftholm, from Jacoby of Ringspire, loremaster and historian:

Greetings.

I realize that it has been over a year since you set me to my task, and I wish to assure you that I have not been idle during that time. I would also like to thank you for your patience—many employers would be bothering me constantly, making any real work impossible to accomplish—but then, as a master crafter, I suspect you understand exactly what I mean. But I meander, and I suspect you are quite anxious to learn about your ancestor and his mysterious creation.

Forgive me if I explain things as if you knew little of your history—this is simply to ensure that I leave nothing out, and it is not intended as an insult, I assure you. Approximately 2100 years ago, the enormous mining complex known as Varnaver was home to communities of both hill and mountain dwarves. This was not as unusual then, as it is now, for the mountain dwarves had yet to go as far underground as they have since, and they often found it advantageous to share space.

Varnaver at that time was in a state of upheaval, with anger growing between both sub-races. The mountain dwarves felt that they should rule the stronghold, for they believed themselves to be the first dwarves, from whom all others were descended, and therefore more worthy of leadership. (I must say that nothing in my studies has at all substantiated that claim, though as a scholar I cannot rule it out entirely as a possibility). The hill dwarves were understandably offended and angered by this sentiment, and they took that anger out on any mountain dwarves they happened to catch alone. From small flames do bonfires grow, and soon Varnaver was approaching a full-scale war between its inhabitants.

This was the situation in the Year of Hungry Rain, when armies of orcs and goblins attacked and lay siege to Varnaver, driven out of their homes by human expansion aboveground. The initial carnage was horrible, as neither hill nor mountain dwarves were prepared for an attack from outside the stronghold—all plans had been for fighting inside. The two dwarven sub-races quickly made a truce, recognizing the invaders as the much greater threat and fighting side by side to drive them out. Not that the people of Varnaver hated each other any less, mind you—they just hated the orcs more.

This is where your ancestor, Trost the Mighty, founder of the Shaftholm clan, enters the story. He was the battle-leader of the hill dwarves, and an oddity among them—a wizard of some great talent as well as a master metal-worker. He was well respected for his marvelous cre-

ations, well constructed and usually enchanted, and many warriors on Varnaver's front lines carried examples of his work. When it began to seem as if the orcs would overwhelm the dwarven army, Trost decided to create his greatest ever work to help turn the tide.

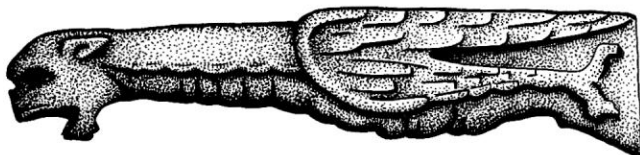
Despite the dwarven preference for the ax, the weapon Trost chose to smith was a short sword. Scattered references to this odd choice seem to imply that the orcs and goblins had taken refuge in narrow natural corridors, and a stabbing weapon was more useful there than one that needed room to be swung. This is, of course, simply speculation, but it seems grounded in logic.

The sword Trost made was beautifully crafted, with barbs on one edge to rend flesh as the sword entered a body and back-barbs to tear it as the blade was removed. Gruesome, yes, but extremely effective. He also played upon the goblinoids' fears by crafting the pommel in the shape of a beast from orcish legend that supposedly ate the souls of those who defied it. This legend may have somewhat inspired Trost, for when he enchanted the weapon he made it into a soultrap.

In what was truly an ingenious way to power a weapon, Trost enchanted the blade so that any who died while wielding it left a very small portion of his soul behind and inside the blade. This sacrifice was not enough to damage the rest of the user's spirit or deny him the reward of his chosen god, but enough to power a new magical ability for the sword, based on the dead wielder's personality and skills. This meant that over time, the powers of the blade would only grow, which is why Trost named it the Legacy Blade.

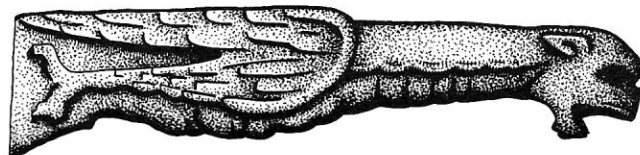
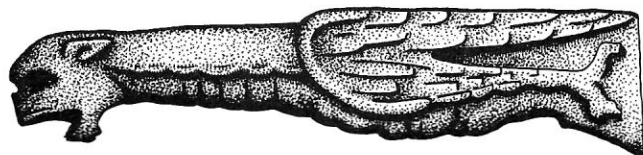
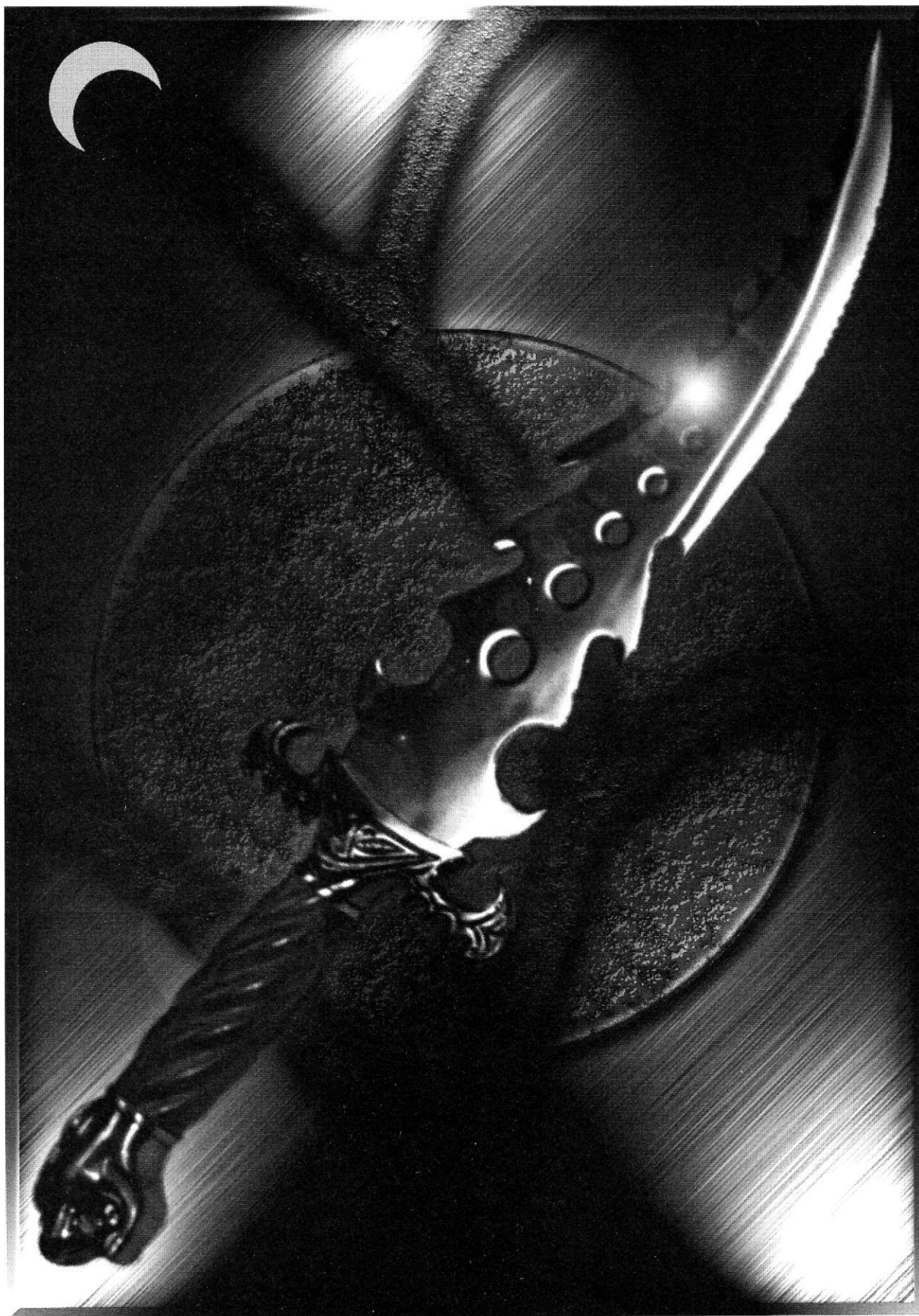
Trost was no fool, however—he knew that if the orcs were defeated, the hill and mountain dwarves would eventually fight again, and he could not bear to have his creation used in such a war. This is why he structured his soultrap enchantment to make the mini-spirits inside drawn to dwarven souls. The effect produced was that any time the blade was used to kill a dwarf, of any kind, the spirits inside the weapon were drawn to the dying dwarf's spirit, sometimes so much so that the spirit fragment broke free of the soultrap and followed the dwarven spirit to its reward. Of course, this meant that the ability that spirit had granted wielders of the blade was lost forever. In this way, Trost guaranteed that if the Legacy Blade was ever used in a dwarven civil war, that eventually it would lose nearly all of its enchantment and become no better than any of the others he had created.

Even with the Legacy Blade, the dwarves were hard-pressed, and later that year Trost was slain while using it. His spirit seemed to simply make the blade even deadlier and keener than before, and it was taken up and used by a long succession of dwarven warriors. As each was killed by the orcs, the Legacy Blade manifested a new



ability, and soon it was powerful and versatile enough to turn the orcs back forever. With them gone, as Trost predicted, the dwarves began fighting among themselves again, and much of the Legacy Blade's new-found power was lost. In the Year of Spiteful Silence, Varnaver collapsed due to the accidental weakening of several key supports by a passing delver. The creature would normally have been kindly redirected to less vital food, but the dwarves were too busy to notice, and so they were lost. The Legacy Blade disappeared at this point as well, but it has resurfaced many times since.

This letter includes only the tales of those wielders who currently have a spirit fragment in the blade, according to divinations of various types. Those alone required this entire year to research, and if



you wish, I will continue investigating those wielders who no longer power the blade and send you an update letter in the future.

Chronologically, the Legacy Blade's next active spirit donor (after Trost, whose spirit seems to be permanently part of the weapon) was a gnome named Ewen, who used his skills with magic and vast array of tricks to rob people traveling the road between Braclay and Dispia. His favorite trick was to create a heavy mist on the road around his target, using the confusion this generated to slip in and either make off with the traveler's pouch or rob him entirely of possessions. This tactic led to him being known in that area as the "Mist Phantom," and I have in my library a fanciful bard's song that I believe was written about him.

This tactic, which made Ewen famous, also got him killed. Adventurers hired by a noble of Dispia set a trap for him, and the old woman Ewen thought he was robbing turned out to be a disguised warrior well trained in the art of fighting blind. When Ewen crept out, sword in hand, to rob her, the "old woman" cut him nearly in two. The gnome's spirit is the source of the Legacy Blade's power to call up mist whenever desired.

Next in line was Nathalia, who came along three centuries later. Unlike those before her, Nathalia was not an adventurer or anything like that—she was an actress. A human beauty, Nathalia was the first woman to rise to prominence on the stage in Transibax, and she was an expert on disguises of all kinds. She often played male parts, despite her obviously female figure and features, and was so skilled at altering herself that the crowds rarely noticed. It soon became a game among theatergoers to try to guess which character was actually Nathalia in disguise, and she was revealed after each performance to howls of delight.

Nathalia was given the Legacy Blade for use as a prop during a performance, and apparently she was completely unaware of its magical nature. After her first performance using it, she revealed herself, as normal, and took a bow, sword in hand. An enraged gambler in the crowd, having just lost a large sum betting on which character she was playing, picked up a rock and hurled it at the stage. The rock struck Nathalia directly in the temple as she bowed, and she fell bleeding to the stage. Angry, she stood up brandishing the weapon and looking for her attacker. Frightened, the gambler this time threw a knife, which struck Nathalia in the eye and killed her instantly. The angry crowd quickly beat the killer to death. Poor Nathalia is the source of the sword's ability to change its wielder's appearance drastically, much as the actress could.

Some 255 years after Nathalia came Ninian, a human explorer about whom little is recorded. He was one of the

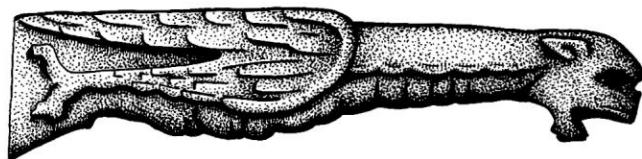
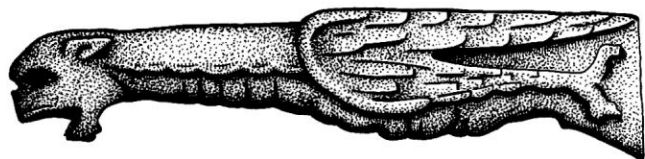
first civilized people to enter the jungles of Herya, and most maps in use today were originally drawn by him. Scattered records indicate that Ninian was always on the move, rarely resting, as he explored some of the most inhospitable and rough country found outside of the Northern Wastes. Unlike those who followed after, who made friends with the barbarian tribes native to the jungles and often stayed with them, Ninian seems to have been driven to keep going, never stopping in one place long enough to make any friends or learn the ways of the jungle folk. His goal was making maps, and Ninian let nothing deter him from it.

How and when Ninian died was something I couldn't discover. Apparently, he simply disappeared during one of his mapping expeditions in Herya and was never heard from again. Though I do not know the exact circumstances of his death, I feel confident in stating that Ninian is the source of the Legacy Blade's ability to grant its wielder incredible endurance. Be aware, however, that I cannot back this statement up with absolute fact. Nevertheless, I am confident that my guess is correct.

The sword resurfaced 340 years later in the hands of the renowned wizard Endrede, a pioneer in the development of abjuration magic and a famous magical theorist. He appears to have been actively studying the Legacy Blade and may even have known it for what it was, though as an abjuration specialist he had fairly poor skill with divination. Regardless, all of my texts and divinations agree that Endrede had the weapon for only a short time before he was killed. As he sat in his library studying the blade, Endrede heard a noise. He turned and saw an assassin who had somehow penetrated all of his magical defenses. His first reaction was to grip the Legacy Blade and prepare to fight, but he was dead before he could do anything, and the assassin stole the sword. I believe Endrede to be the reason the Legacy Blade can dispel magic, as that is known to have been his favorite spell.

The man who killed Endrede is the Legacy Blade's next wielder, a half-elven assassin by the name of Morley the Spider. His skills as an assassin are recorded in several of my tomes, and he specialized in getting through defenses everyone thought were impenetrable. Exactly how he did this is still a mystery, though he certainly got better at it after he obtained the Legacy Blade.

Morley was given his odd nickname because of his incredible climbing skill, something that certainly made his "mystery entrances" easier, though there must have been more to it than that. At one point, on a bet, Morley climbed a building shaped like an upside-down pyramid without a rope or any tools—quite an impressive feat. As most of his kind do, Morley the Spider eventually fell prey to his own kind and was killed by a younger assassin trying to make a name for himself. From Morley, the



Legacy Blade gained the power to grant magical climbing ability to its wielder—fittingly, just like the spell spider climb.

Some five hundred years after Morley died, Trost's creation appeared in the possession of a wizard who may possibly have been insane. Zebulon of Hritane is just as famous as Endrede, perhaps even more so, but not for advances in magic or his great skill. No, every book he is mentioned in describes Zebulon as the biggest gossip of the magical world, as well as a voyeur. Nothing delighted Zebulon more than eavesdropping or watching his fellow magicians (or anyone else, for that matter) with his magic. He single-handedly popularized spells such as nondetection and false vision, and one wizard made his fortune creating and selling amulets of proof against detection and location.

As you might expect, Zebulon was not at well liked by his fellows, and eventually he must have offended the wrong magician. He was found one day, lying next to the Legacy Blade, in his house—or rather, his ashes were. Zebulon had finally gone too far, it was surmised, and no one cared enough to investigate any further. Zebulon is certainly the source of the sword's scrying ability.

Your ancestor's sword disappeared once again after that, this time for quite a long period. Lost for centuries, it has only recently reappeared. This time may very well be the end of the sword, for its current wielder seems obsessed with the slaughter of the entire dwarven race, and he is using the Legacy Blade to do it. I very much fear that if he kills enough dwarves with that blade, it will lose its enchantment entirely, and you will lose the chance to use it in your bid to create a new home for hill dwarves and mountain dwarves alike.

The current wielder of the Legacy Blade is a young human named Macer Hatebearer. His story is tragic, to be sure, and it appears to have driven him mad. Macer lived until recently in Scarford, a human village on the very outskirts of the kingdom of Dumfod. The dwarves of Hajima, who live next to Dumfod, mainly underground, have been neutral toward their neighbors for many years, content to observe as Dumfod establishes itself. In the recent past, however, the king of Dumfod has come to realize that his kingdom has reached the limits of its expansion and can grow no more unless he goes to war or finds another solution.

The king's solution, apparently, has been to expand into dwarven territory, assuming that because the dwarves live underground that they won't object. Scarford was the

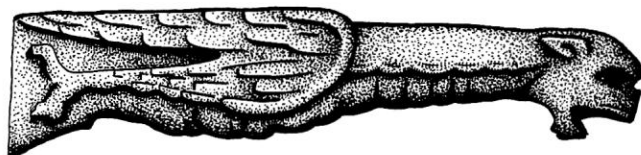
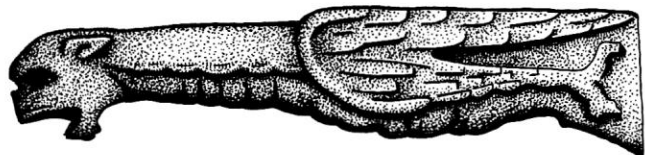
first village of Dumfod established in the ancestral lands of the dwarves, and for a time it was prosperous. The dwarves, rightly angry at the actions of their human neighbors, sent several diplomatic envoys to Dumfod but quickly realized that diplomacy was having little effect. Determined to teach the humans the error of their ways, the dwarves attacked Scarford, driving the humans out and destroying the village.

Macer was away at the time, receiving training as a warrior in Dumfod's capital, but he returned when he heard what had occurred. What he found in the remnants of Scarsdale must have destroyed his mind. In the ashes of his home were the remains of his entire family, apparently caught inside while the house burned and roasted alive. I have no doubt that this was an accident, for the dwarves of Hajima are not given to such horrible acts, but Macer feels differently. He has sworn to kill every last dwarf he can find, as revenge for the loss of his family, and he stalks the caverns of Hajima doing just that.

Somewhere, possibly hidden away in Hajima, Macer found the Legacy Blade. He has put it to use in his murderous campaign and has done more than slaughter dozens of dwarves—he has removed an unknown number of powers from the sword. He uses its powers to escape detection by the dwarves he hunts, stepping out of the mist or the stone itself to plunge the blade into an unsuspecting dwarf's back, or disguising himself as a dwarf to catch his victims unaware, then escaping by moving on the ceilings. Thus far, no Hajima patrol has been able to catch him.

Macer has honed his skills as a warrior and a killer during this time, learning to use the Legacy Blade as if it were an extension of his arm, as well as how to hide in the dark and move as quietly as a mouse. The man's entire being is focused on the murder of dwarves, and he is using a tool made for the salvation of dwarves in his mad quest. The irony of the situation is disturbing.

And so I conclude my letter, master smith, with a request to you: stop him. Please, if you can, reclaim your ancestor's creation and make it great again. Macer must be stopped, before he destroys a piece of your heritage as well as innumerable lives. I must caution you, however—if you do go after him, and I hope you do, do not kill him while he wields the blade. Capture him and take it or knock him unconscious if you can, for I greatly fear that if he dies while wielding it, the Legacy Blade will take his hatred of dwarves into itself, and the weapon will be perverted forever.



Singing Sword of Camelot

The ancient singing sword of Camelot was designed by Merlin and enchanted by him during the building of castle Camelot. The most worthy of knights used the weapon on behalf of the kingdom whenever victory was most desperately needed. At such times, Arthur would take the blade from its simple alcove resting-place at the heart of Camelot and present it to one of his most worthy knights. In battle, the blade would give that warrior great power over his foes. Even when such a hero fell in battle, purchasing victory with his very life, the blade magically transported itself back to the alcove in Camelot castle, to wait for a time when it would be needed again. No single knight ever owned the weapon; it was designed to be ever in the service of those who lived the ideal that was Camelot.

Legends speak of how Merlin picked the location for castle Camelot. It seems he was traveling across England, seeking for the best in water and defensive locations for what was intended to be the ultimate castle of castles. Eventually, Merlin's magics moved the mage to the south and west of the country. One night, as the aged wizard camped under the light of a full moon, a falling star struck a nearby hill. Merlin went to the spot and magically gathered up this metal from the sky and marked the hill as the future building site for the enchanted castle that was to become Camelot. The archmage decided the metal from the falling star would serve perfectly to make an enchanted sword, shield, armor, and other magical items for the defense of Camelot's ideals of honor and glory. He took the sky metal to an old dwarven smith who had long been his friend, and charged the dwarf to make a sword and armor suitable for the greatest of kings. In payment, the diminutive smith could keep any extra metal that was left over. (Merlin had some understanding of the smith's art, and he knew there would be metal for at least 10 more suits of armor.) The sword and shield were delivered first to the new castle, and they helped to keep Camelot safe from many powerful foes from around the world.

Thomas of Northumberland's Story: Thomas of Northumberland was known as one of the kingdom's greatest jousters. The day he was knighted by King Arthur and became a member of the Table Round, he felt his strength increase as the sword of Camelot touched his shoulders during the ceremony. At Arthur's order, Sir Thomas was given the Sword of Camelot and told to take a band of knights to the castle of Lord Raldemar of the Northern Marches. This unruly lord was said to be preparing a war band to invade the lands of Camelot, and Sir Thomas was supposed to try to convince the warriors

of the Northern Marches—through force of arms if necessary—that fighting with the knights of Camelot was never a wise idea. He set out with 40 knights and discovered upon his arrival at Lord Raldemar's castle that the lord had already prepared a huge band of 500 knights and warriors to strike at Camelot. Thomas knew that his band could not defeat so many warriors, so he challenged Raldemar to personal combat, with the stipulation that the victor would become the lord over the other for 24 months. The thought of acquiring the great knight Thomas as a vassal, along with all his wealth, land, and numerous assets, was too tempting for Raldemar to pass up.

The lord had heard that Sir Thomas had great skill with a lance, so he announced that the duel would be on foot with sword and shield only. Sir Thomas knew of Raldemar's skill with a sword, but he had to trust in the Sword of Camelot and his good right arm to see him through. He dismounted, and his 40 men stood on one side of the dueling area, and the 500 of the Northern Marches stood on the other side. Knowing the nature of the weapon he was about to draw, Sir Thomas asked Raldemar a question.

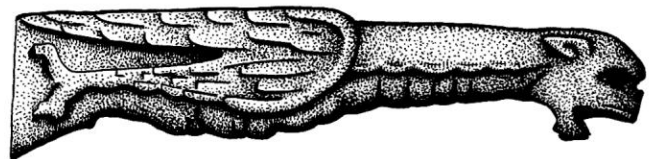
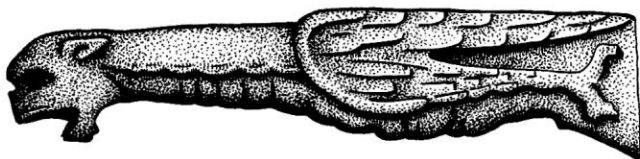
"Raldemar, do you declare yourself an acknowledged foe of Camelot?" Sir Thomas stood proud and waited for his enemy's reply.

Raldemar drew his longsword and said, "Yes, without question it is Camelot and its pipsqueak king that I hate above all things!"

"Thank you, then," Sir Thomas replied, and with a smile he drew the Sword of Camelot and advanced. With the first blow, the sword began wailing a battle chant, startling Sir Thomas and all the warriors on the field. The sword's enchanted singing grew louder with every blow, and in just a few passes the shield of Raldemar was splintered, becoming a useless weight on his arm. Another pass of weapons, and the Sword of Camelot sheared Raldemar's sword in half. Ever the courteous knight, Sir Thomas stood back and allowed the lord to rearm himself with another weapon. Bravely, Raldemar turned to his men, weary but not defeated, and shouted an order.

"Whatever happens to me, my brave war band, the honor this knight has shown me must be rewarded. If I die in this combat, I order all of you not to enter the lands of Camelot seeking revenge. I also order you all to fight with all your might against the common foes of Camelot and my lands, no matter what their origin, for the rest of your lives."

Raldemar bowed back to the knight and selected a two-handed sword to continue the battle, but there was fear in his eyes, and all continued to hear the battle chant of Sir Thomas' sword. While Sir Thomas wasn't the most skilled at swordplay, the weapon he carried in the defense



of Camelot gave his arms and eye an enchantment that day, making him far more skillful than he normally would be on the field of battle. The Sword of Camelot was light in his hand, and on defense it took the strokes from Raldemar's great, seven-foot long, two-handed sword and never shattered or chipped. On the contrary, that day, Sir Thomas took chunks out of his foe's weapon, as time and again his blade swept in and under the defense of his foe's strikes, to hammer and cut away at the armor of Lord Raldemar.

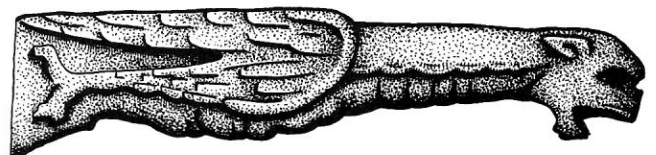
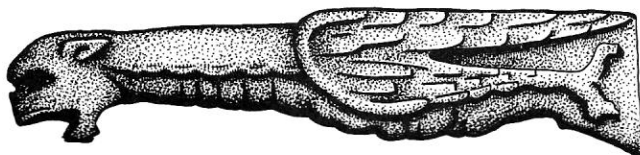
The two fought a great battle from the early dawn to high noon. Sir Thomas took the measure of Raldemar and knew him to be a better swordsman, but Lord Raldemar didn't have the Sword of Camelot in his hand that day. Ultimately, Raldemar was defeated in single combat and forced to kneel before Sir Thomas. The



Sword of Camelot had once again saved Arthur's kingdom from great evil.

Ten days later an army of 540 knights rode up to the gates of Camelot. Although with the gates closed and the drawbridge up, the castle's inhabitants were safe from attack, they could not help but fear that they were in for a terrible siege. Then Sir Thomas opened his cloak and had his squire blow his famous challenge horn. Sir Thomas had brought the entire army of Lord Raldemar to swear allegiance to Arthur.

Arthur greeted his former enemy with open arms, because kindness and friendship were the keystones of his kingdom. This noble act to a defeated foe was to stand Arthur in good stead for the next many years, as war plagued his land and Lord Raldemar and his knights were ever there to stand shoulder to shoulder with the knights of Camelot.



The Red Knight's Story: It was December 21st, the Winter Solstice, when the Red Knight came to the solstice feast of castle Camelot. It was the custom of Arthur and Merlin to wait on eating at the Solstice Feast until some quest came to find the knights at Camelot. In past years, barons had come pleading that ogre's needed to be killed in their lands, or princesses had come begging for help against this or that terrible wizard foe, and once a small boy came stumbling into the hall begging to be trained as a knight. Arthur, for the tenth time in the last two hours, asked Merlin if they couldn't, just this once, start eating at last, with the hope of someone coming for help during the meal. Merlin sagely shook his head and assured his liege that something would be happening soon.

No sooner were those words spoken than the Red Knight strode into the great hall of Camelot with a huge red banner in his hand. Advancing to the center of the hall, the Red Knight jammed the spiked pole of his red banner solidly into the floor at the joint of four large stones. Unknown to this knight and the rest of the people assembled there, the magical nature of castle Camelot really became irritated at this mark of defiance. The enchantments placed on the castle, and the ley lines of magic within, made the castle much more than a place of insensate stone. There was an intelligence within the walls that always acted to aid its dwellers in the cause of honor.

An enchanted wind of the Red Knight's making rose up, and Merlin cast protective magics on all others who were in the chamber. It was an unusually powerful feat of protective spell casting, even for Merlin, the age's greatest wizard.

"I'm the Red Knight," the interloper proclaimed. "I've come to challenge all the knights of Camelot, and this banner will stand until one of you defeats me. I declare that Arthur is a fool, his wizard is a charlatan, and the heroes of this castle are weak and lack honor." Naturally, every one of Arthur's knights immediately clamored to fight this new enemy. Gone were any thoughts of eating, but Arthur, always the consummate strategist, held back and continued to watch this knight. He raised his hand for silence, and the hall grew quiet save for the enchanted wind howling among the tables. He took a moment to notice the death's skull on the Red Knight's dark battle pennant.

"You will sit at my table and sup with us. As we are the challenged, tomorrow we will hold a joust, and you will touch lances with Sir Dinadan."

"It will be as you wish, young king," the Red Knight spat, making the word "young" sound like an insult given to an inferior. Slowly, he raised his visor to reveal a face so badly scarred and disfigured as to be barely recognizable as human.

"I will eat in my armor and leave as soon as the meal is finished. My face and form are not pleasing to the sensitive eyes of the court ladies. You should put me at a table away from them."

"Oh no," King Arthur replied. "You will sit across from me, and I will serve you dinner myself."

The nobility of that statement touched even the Red Knight, and he bowed to the king and sat at a bench placed for him. With a snap of his fingers, the wind stopped howling, and his pennon fell to rest. Through the rest of the meal, he was quiet and only answered the questions of Arthur—and even then with the shortest of sentences.

The next day dawned bright and clear, and all the nobility of Camelot rose early to view the joust. The Red Knight insisted that the loser would serve the winner for two years. This was fine with Sir Dinadan, as he didn't plan on losing. Sir Dinadan looked splendid in his bold white armor and tabard. In the first pass of lances, both knights broke their lance on the shield of the other. In the second pass, the Red Knight completely unhorsed Sir Dinadan, and the knight lay unconscious on the field. The Red Knight rode confidently up to Arthur's viewing throne.

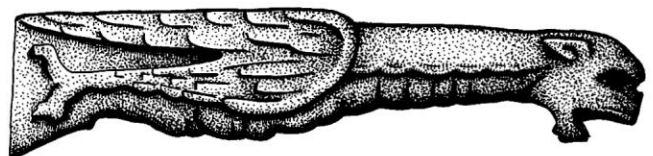
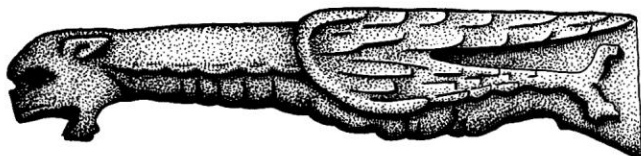
"When your knight wakes up, send him south. He will find my castle anon. I will return next year to challenge your 'youngsters' again."

For one year, the knights of Camelot searched for the castle of the Red Knight but never found it. Arthur and Merlin ate day after day in the great hall and viewed the Red Knight's banner with irritation, cursing the day he came there. Their anger was not half as powerful, however, as the irritation the castle felt at the red spike planted in its floor.

The next winter solstice saw the Red Knight come again with Sir Dinadan in tow. The knight of Camelot was able to confirm the existence of a large castle, constantly shrouded in fog. Sir Dinadan also said he was never asked to do unknighly things, but he was frequently forced to fight enchanted monsters that seemed to frequent the Red Knight's lands. This time Arthur made his former knight and the Red Knight eat as he served them both. Again, the Red Knight was moved by Arthur's noble gesture.

Still, the Red Knight once again challenged all the knights of the kingdom. This time, however, he requested a sword duel, and he asked to fight two different knights. Arthur was only too pleased to grant his request. The castle itself was also pleased, as the knight would be fighting on its earth.

The next morning, Sir Gareth and Sir Tolet stood ready in their plate mail for the battle. They were each champions of over a hundred sword duels, and few could match



them stroke for stroke. The Red Knight drew his longsword and stood in the dueling circle, signaling for Sir Gareth to come face his challenge. In just three exchanges of blades, Sir Gareth had his sword broken to shards and was forced to yield. Sir Tolet spoke to his squire, "Bring my other longsword; my rapier won't last one passage against the Red Knight's weapon." Young squire Hudson was off at a run. He was new to the paths of the castle, but he was eager to obey his master. The castle was just as eager to help him. Using earth enchantment, castle Camelot confused the squire and sent him round and round until he began to panic at the loss of time. Squire Hudson knew his knight would have to begin fighting soon or forfeit the duel, and that couldn't be allowed to happen. For the third time, the squire passed the alcove where the Sword of Camelot rested. The boy knew the weapon was important, because of its unusual resting place, but just giving a sword, any sword, to his knight overruled all his normal caution. He took the sword from its sheath, and he felt new strength fill his limbs as he raced for the combat circle in the jousting grounds of the castle. The castle was well pleased with his effort and also gave enchanted energy to the young squire to speed him on his way. Squire Hudson placed the weapon in his knight's hands, and Sir Tolet knew at once what he held. The presenting of this sword was for the king alone. Even taking it from its resting place of honor was a grave deed that might bring dire punishment to his young squire. He knelt down to Arthur and raised the weapon.

"Sire, my squire didn't know what he did. Please forgive his indiscretion."

Arthur smiled at what chance had given him. This was the perfect weapon for this battle, and Arthur was amazed he had not thought of it himself. If the mighty shield and armor of Camelot were not being used far to the east, he would have eagerly given them to Tolet as well.

"I think we can ignore the usual ceremony for the passing of this sword. Tolet, use the blade and win for Camelot. Red Knight, do you still say you are a foe of Camelot and all its knights?"

The Red Knight nodded fiercely, and Arthur's smile grew wider. Tolet rushed the Red Knight, and with the first passage of arms, the Sword of Camelot started singing its battle chant. It was an old war song, and it filled Sir Tolet with great energy and darkened the heart of the Red Knight. That day, the sword play was beyond anything the knights of Camelot had ever seen, and although Sir Tolet knew the Red Knight was stronger and a better swordsman, the knight of Camelot was aided by the earth, the sun, and one of the greatest magical swords of the age. In the first hour, both men lost their shields —

even though the shield of the Red Knight was made of adamantine. In the second hour, the Sword of Camelot changed its magical tune to a grim dirge, and the ladies of the court were driven away in shivering fear as the deadly melody chilled all to their very heart. At the third hour, King Arthur came between the two combatants and ordered them to rest and take wine. Neither wanted to stop, but the king would not be denied, and when he stood between the two battlers with Excalibur drawn, his raw power made them hold their weapons up. As the Red Knight drank his wine, he moved respectfully toward Sir Tolet.

"I would pay several gold coins to watch this fight," he said. "You are a canny swordsman in the service of your king."

Sir Tolet wasn't in the mood to chat, but he had to acknowledge the compliment.

"You are too kind sir. I hope the shield I destroyed had not been in your family too long."

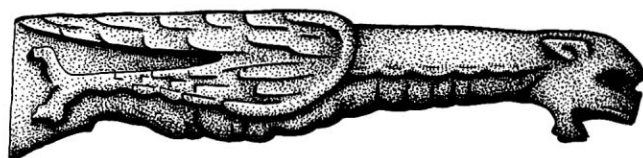
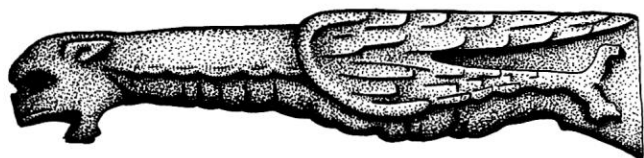
"It was a family heirloom used by my father and forefathers for over 1,000 years, but pay it no mind. That undercutting stroke you've used several times is new to me, and I've studied most of the sword attack styles of the mortal world."

Sir Tolet smiled, "I learned that cut from elves in a dark forest where I was trapped for four years. I thought I saw several French fighting tactics in your own moves. By the way, I'm done hacking at your armor, let's get back to it shall we?"

"An excellent idea." The Red Knight closed his visor and walked into the battle circle again.

The battle continued for two more hours. The song of the Sword of Camelot changed in the last hour to a quick striking tune, and the men of the castle greatly enjoyed singing the refrain to accompany the blade. Sir Dinadan stood, not cheering, even though all the knights of the castle knew his true feelings. With several bold slices, the sword of Camelot struck the Red Knight's own enchanted sword out of his hands, and he was forced to yield. The cheering of the knights of Camelot could be heard five miles away.

The Red Knight was forced to reveal his whole story. It seemed that he was lord of an enchanted land touching the lands of man only two times a year. The Red Knight was constantly fighting enchanted creatures. He seized upon the concept of challenging and taking knights from Camelot into his lands to help him battle all the dread monsters. Once the knights of Camelot understood his problem they became eager to help, and there was a rush to his lands. Soon knights were bringing home the hides of hydras and chimeras, and their tales of battle became famous around the Table Round.



Absolute

By Hand,
Birth-day, the Seventeenth Day of Baelan
in the fourth year of the reign of Mantua III, Emperor of
North and West

Father and Mother,

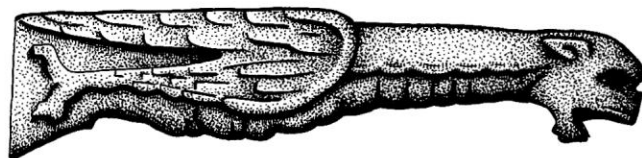
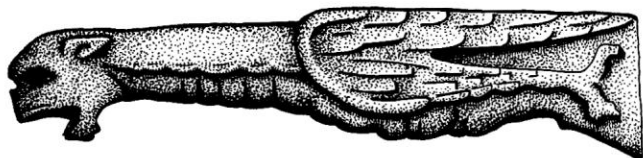
I hope this letter finds you both well rested after a busy summer and certainly an equally busy harvest. News here is that the summer was mild and not too rainy – perfect for getting out a fine crop, and that there was hardly any unrest or strife to put down made for a nearly perfect season. Here in the south it has been unseasonably hot. One of my lieutenants described it as a "poaching heat," the sort of weather where it is simply impossible to wear metal armor or fight during the day, because you'll either be scalded or slow roasted in your own juices. This has led to an increase in sneak attacks that wear out the patience of the troops, myself included, and put everyone on edge.

You should both be made aware, it occurs to me, that the war is neither going well nor badly. It simply goes on, much as it has for all these bloody years. My men are weary, to be sure, as am I. Veterans like us seem to survive every battle, while it is the young newcomers who are slain. Too inexperienced to know when to duck, when to fight, when to retreat. They are a stain on the ground before we get to know their names. Once I cared a great deal more about them, but that time has all but vanished. That I cannot care so much any more is what has me most vexed.

In the nine months since last I wrote to you, much has changed about me, the war, and my place in it. Now, on my Birth-day, I must tell you something about me that you do not know and perhaps cannot even anticipate. By the time you receive this letter, I will have given up Absolute and my life as I had known it, and taken the Vows of Non-Violence that mark one as a member of the Healing Orders of Erdith. I make this decision fully aware of what it means for my future and the future of our family. I have not chosen this new path without careful thought and consideration, despite what I know you will be saying when you read this. Father, spare your tears. Mother, spare your anger. You will be too late to change me from this path. Do not worry for me, either of you. The decisions I make are for me alone, and I know of what I speak, though it may be difficult for me to explain it to you through this letter; I have always been a better orator than a writer, and we know each other well enough that I can convey more with a single glance than

with a fistful of words. Still, I must try. You need to understand why I have done this, and what will become of Absolute.

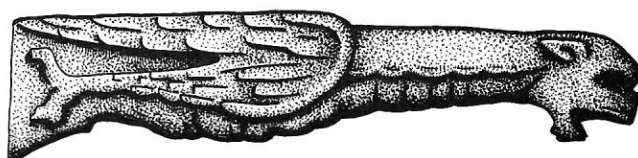
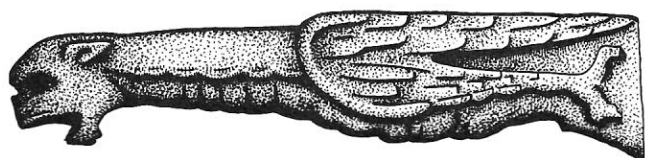
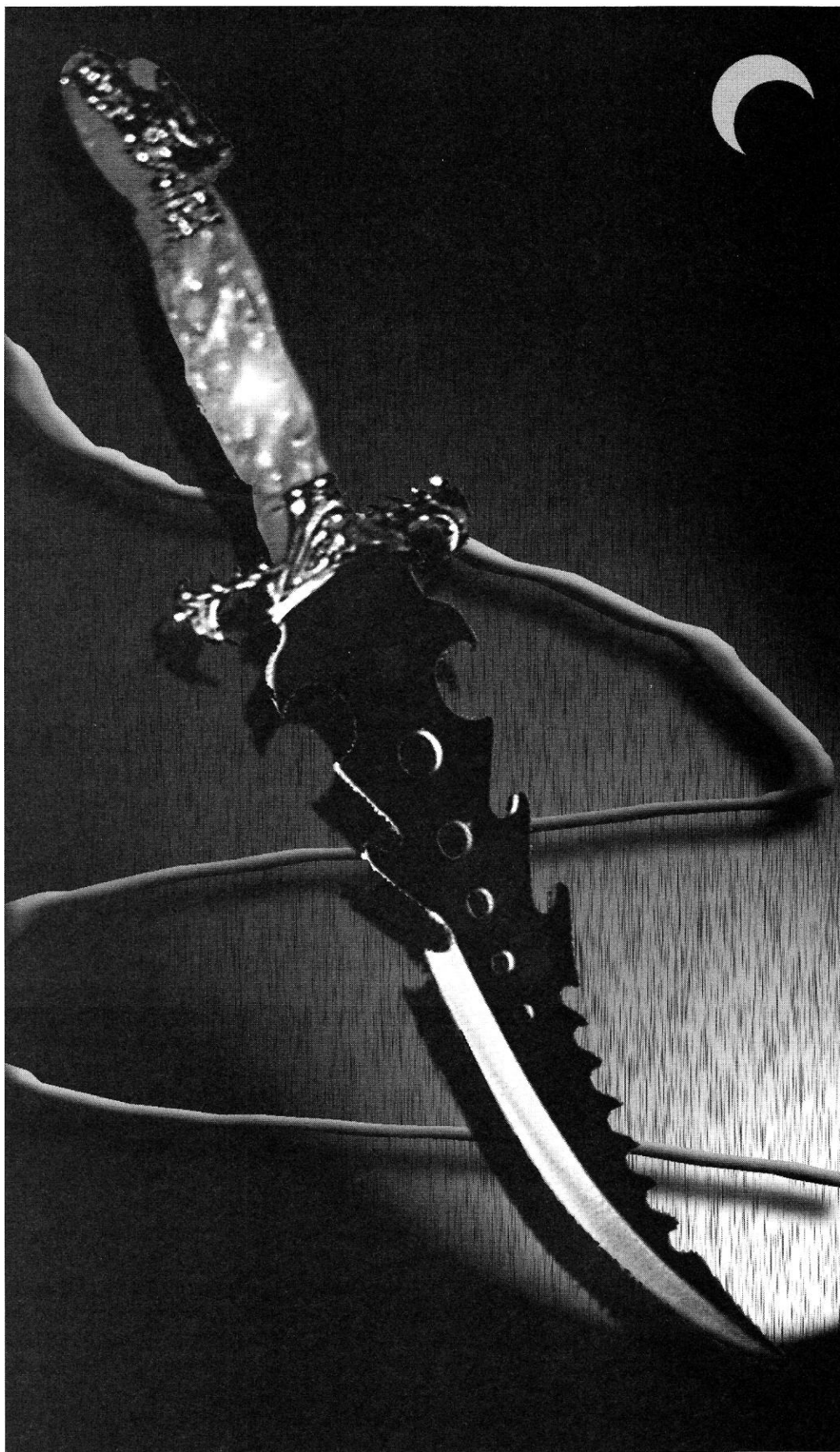
Since he came to the Granite Throne, I have served the Emperor with enthusiasm and the fervent belief in the rightness of his cause. I thought little of the consequences of this service. It is not the ways of the young to think of the future or to consider possibilities. Oh, to be so young again, to walk so blindly yet confidently through life, aware of no consequences, effectively immortal. You remember me from those days best, I fear, for what I was before now. That is a pity. I have always been strong and keen-eyed, big for my age, but without the lack of focus that usually comes with brawny strength. I have never used my strength except in the service of my family or my Emperor, with one exception. When I had attained fifteen suns, during a tournament sponsored by Duke Atrias of Malmac, I used my fists in violence. There was a retainer to the duke, named Strophen Alidats, who was as dark-skinned and intemperate as any Southroner you might care to meet. He wore only roomy linen pants and a pair of light boots, although it was chilly during that tourney. After his a victory in knife throwing, a young woman of our village named April was in the front row, clapping vigorously for Strophen. I observed this with interest, as he was not from our homeland. Even as a fifteen-year-old, however, I was not innocent to the ties that bind men and women, so I watched her and him as their carefully orchestrated dance evolved into something much more complex. It was well past nightfall when, from within the tent in which I knew Strophen had taken April, I heard the then-unfamiliar sounds of love making; the tittering and cooing, muffled pillow talk and the tender unfastening of belts and clothing. None of this alarmed me, such was the nature of the camp in those days, until I began to drift to sleep, startled awake only by a cry which was immediately muffled. I'm unsure why I was the only one to hear, but it seemed that I was. I hurried to the tent and threw open its flap to see her struggling with the Southroner. I told him to leave her be, but when he refused, I felt I had no choice. I leapt into the air with perfect precision, grappling Strophen before he could have his way with April. As I struggled with Strophen, April fled. It was short order until I got the Southroner under control, but I did have to fight quite hard and I became angry. My anger contributed to the violence which I brought to Strophen. I heard a few years after the fact that he was never able to throw a knife with precision again, let alone ride a horse. I broke him, Father and Mother, though he had never done anything to me. Surely his crime against the girl touched me deeply, but where was my restraint? Where was the reason that you both schooled me in so well? Self control had abandoned



me and that fellow became my victim. I was never able to get that incident out of my head. I was responsible for destroying a man's life, and that was just with my fists.

Father, I would ask you to recall my investment into the Order of the Knights Ordinal. Do you remember? I'm sure that you must, you were so proud, both of you. I was twenty, three years into my training with the greatest warriors of the land and ten years into my training with sword, shield, and mount. It is not arrogance to say that I was a great warrior, one of the best, if not the best of my generation. You yourself said this, Father, and Mother, I know you agreed, because you never cry, except for joy. So you gave me Absolute, Father, because the long dagger had passed through our family for twenty generations, used only when there was a true warrior to take it in hand for its intended purpose. You never used it, did you, Father? Nor did your father or his father before him. It had been a long time since that instrument of death had been taken from its place of honor in the home and used to slay its owner's enemies. Were you afraid of it, Father? Or did you just feel it was your fatherly duty to pass it on to the son you thought you'd never have? I was strong and skilled, that is beyond doubt. But was I wise enough to take possession of Absolute when you gave it to me? I think the answer to that question is no.

In less than five years, I have become one of the most renowned warriors in the service of the Emperor. Has our son become a braggard, you ask? Such arrogance, indeed! No, I



tell you I speak not from self infatuation but from simple observation and fact. I no longer have the passions to invent such nonsense for your amusement. I'm am far too tired for that. That I am renowned through the Empire is simply a fact. I have visited the capital twice to be awarded medals by the Emperor himself. I lead men, and they follow—I have never had my orders questioned. Not once. I inspire loyalty in my men. It is not too much to say that, in essence, they worship me and what I represent. Yes, I said worship, but I'm sure I hear you asking in what sense? I tell you, it is more than the loyalty that a dog shows its master, more even than a young boy idolizes his talented older brother. They worship me as if I were a god, a god of war, and if there were a temple to me they would visit and pray. And what is it that I represent? Victory, to be sure, but also power, vigor, masculinity. All of these things and more. To some, I am their ideal warrior. Then why is it that at night, when I am alone with my thoughts and dreams that I tremble with fright for my very soul. Tears come to the corners of my eyes and I think of my family and what will happen to me and to them when, as is inevitable, I am slain. What have I done? I have killed one hundred and ninety one times with Absolute. Some monsters, most men, men like me but yet not like me. I have changed, probably for the worst (you be the judges). Have I slain better men than I, more learned, more compassionate? Certainly yes, but they all died the same, just as swiftly, just as easily. As with most things, I remember the first most clearly. Let me tell you about it, since when last I came home I was unable to do so to your face.

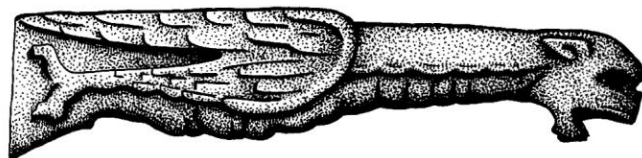
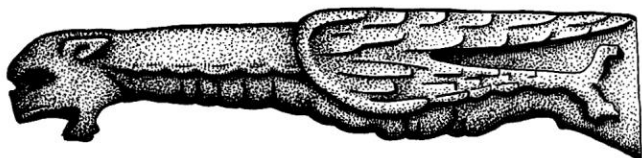
We had been on a spying mission near the city of Kandres, well past the frontier between our nation and the southern kingdoms. Yes, spying. This war has gotten ugly, in more ways than I can possibly describe. No longer a conflict where men stand toe-to-toe and look each other in the eye, we now more often skulk in shadows and strike from where we are not seen. Shameful is what I called it at first, but now I know it is necessary. We weren't supposed to be there, but our commander had ordered us to investigate a kidnapping of the daughter of the mayor of one of the border towns. We found no evidence that the southerners were involved in this kidnapping, but who needs evidence in time of war? Surely our enemies are always in the wrong. We did discover the presence of a powerful and wicked assassin's guild that was planning to strike our homeland. Our lieutenant, cocky and too sure of himself, ordered us in, though we did not know what we were doing and had no reason to be there. Getting over the wall of the guild house was easy, once we'd discovered where they were holed up. Rather than taking a place in the center of the city, they had taken over a home up a hill and a good twenty-five

minutes from the nearest police barracks. I was surprised that they were so poorly defended, but what did I know about assassins and home defense? I was doing what I was told. We stole in through an unguarded bulkhead in the back of the house and penetrated the basement. We fanned out. I went with two of my mates up a staircase to the second floor, where we discovered in a closed bedroom a young man, bookish and thin, strapped to a sturdy chair. His eyes had rolled up in their sockets and the room's air was thinly filled with smoke, though there was no fireplace. It amazes me now, looking back on it, how little I was moved by the pathetic captive. The time I when my heart would have leapt to my throat to see such an injustice had long passed. We simply hurried to the prisoner and began working his straps to pry him loose. I noticed out of the corner of my eye that one of my fellows had spotted a brazier of burnished silver in the corner, apparently the source of the smoke. He opened the lid.

A shriek sounded, bringing, seemingly from nowhere, a half-dozen attackers who threw us back on ourselves. Where had they been hiding? How had we missed them in our approach? They must have been veterans, too, like us. I must tell you that I don't really remember the battle or how I was the only one of us to survive the conflict. All I remember is feeling a need—a need in my chest, in my bones, to kill someone. I had never felt this way before, and I was frightened. What was happening to me? What evil moved my limbs, for it could not be my own mind, it couldn't be! I remember pulling Absolute from its sheath, and I remember the look on the face of the assassin I killed. In retrospect, he couldn't have been much older than me, though at the time it seemed to me that he was much older and more threatening than I could have been. Surprise doesn't really capture it. He looked as though I'd done more than take away his life. His eyes told me that he'd lost everything. His life and his afterlife were forfeit to me, was what I thought he was saying at the time. Now, having seen that look so many times, I don't really know what it means, but I can't escape the thought that when I kill, there is something more to it than when one of my friends or soldiers does the same thing. This is because of Absolute.

What did you actually give me, Father? I thought you never touched the dagger because as a simple landlord and farmer, it didn't serve your needs. Did you know about the weapon's true personality? What its goals are? I try to remember, but I cannot recall you ever saying how you came to possess it. What is that story, Father? I cannot believe that you know first-hand the terrible curse upon this blade. If so, how could you have given it to me so openly, with a smile on your face? Even now, I only have the vaguest idea, but I'm no one's servant.

Two weeks ago, I led a troop of men into open battle



with the forces of the southern Kingdoms. You may not realize this, my parents, but the war is going very badly for us. We are losing more and more, though I don't know why. Perhaps they are on the side of right, after all, and we have labored on the side of wrong unknowingly for all these years. It's certainly possible. In the muck and mud and blood of a battle it is difficult to discern who fights for what reason or who might have been right or wrong. The southern armies have actually been operating in our territory for the first time in many years, and my men, despite their best efforts, are regularly thrown back. Two weeks ago, we were involved in a truly terrible battle—the worst of my five-year career. I have no difficulty with spattering blood. No trouble with the dreadful cries of men too far gone to save, and too far away to help. No problem at all with prying my weapon from the flesh of my enemies when it gets stuck in bone and sinew. I am a good warrior, Mother and Father. What I can't take anymore is my heart. This is the reason I'm leaving the armed services of the Emperor. I know I am not a bad person, but ever since the first time I have used that dagger, I've felt like I am increasingly not in control of myself.

Do you remember when Jonan ingested drahalan for the first time? If only my brother had been stronger, been able to resist its siren call. His refusal to listen to reason is what killed him, ultimately. He believed he was so strong of character and self-discipline that he could do anything—including taking drahalan. He was so wrong. I tasted the juice of drahalan just once, and it was mind-altering. It was so powerful; it made me feel so good, Father and Mother, that I couldn't think of doing anything but drinking the sweet juice. I felt sorry for Jonan, but I could do nothing to help him; he couldn't go six hours without drinking the juice, and once he committed to it, he never wanted to give it up. He never did, and that is the lesson that I've learned from his terrible death.

I've seen my dead brother's face a thousand times since, you know. Wandering the slaughter of a battlefield every corpse that looks back at me has his eyes or his nose. No matter how disfigured, no matter how gouged and broken, every dead face retains his countenance. I have no explanation for it, but it is most decidedly true.

He cannot speak to me through their dead forms, but I know he sees me, too, through clouded eyes stung by battle's fury.

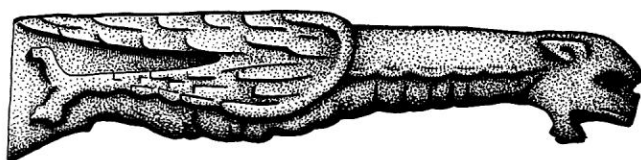
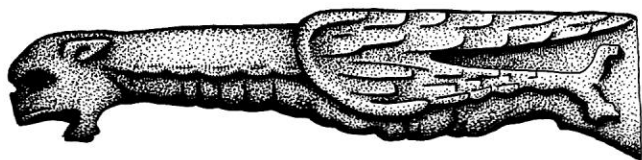
Which brings me to my present. I cannot kill with Absolute ever again. Like Jonan, I've become addicted to what I'm doing, and this cannot continue, no matter the pain to me. It is as though the weapon knows what I'm planning to do, too. It is uncanny, but it is not yet in control of me. I want my FREEDOM, Father and Mother, from what this dagger makes me feel. I don't want to be a man who doesn't realize that killing, even in the service of the Emperor, is ultimately wrong. Absolute has a single mission—murder. Mine must be different. Serving the healing guild is the only way. Their insistence on absolute non-aggression, and the years I will spend first in their isolated monastery in the Galloping Mountains (where I may not be visited) will, I hope, be sufficient to purify my soul from its murdering past. I've no doubt that you and the Emperor and my peers will be disappointed, but I can get past that. None of you may pull me from my intended path, not even the Emperor. The monks will protect me from them, from you, and—with any luck—from myself.

In the Emperor's eyes, I risk becoming an outlaw and traitor. I am prepared for that. Years of warfare have prepared me well for a life on the run. That I can accept. It is your reaction, Mother and Father, that worry me far more. My decisions are my own, and they are final. Tell me, have I done wrong in your eyes? Are you disappointed in me?

I have disposed of the dagger as I've seen fit, Father. With Jonan dead and you and Mother both in your declining years, I saw no reason to send it back to you. Perhaps my actions will save the next generation from the weapon's pull. As I have no intention of having children once I enter the monastery, there will be no one after me to whom to leave the dagger. Don't seek for it, Father, you will never find it.

Wishing that this letter was coming from a different place,

Your son, Adin.



Pashymyarra, Ceremonial Blade of Memory and Wisdom

The name Pashymyarra is whispered with reverence and awe in the realms of high elves. Every elf knows this enchanted name, and every elf speaks it carefully, but only a handful have stood in the same room as Pashymyarra. No elf dares to speak this name in the presence of humans, dwarves, or other races, for the existence of Pashymyarra is a closely guarded secret. Its loss from the elf kingdom could mean disaster for the elves and death to countless souls.

Three thousand years ago, the elven realm was under siege by orcs and gnolls of the Granitecrush Mountains. A war had raged for decades, begun by an assault of the ragged, beastly races upon the elves' capital city of Uumaruu. The elves immediately sprang to defense and then to an assault on the gnolls and orcs. But the elves suffered in the harsh conditions of the mountains, and the humanoids fared poorly in the spired city of the elves. The war dragged on in a near stalemate for close to a century. Losses on both sides were not great, but the surprise assaults on the elven capital banished peace and tranquility, and the elves demanded that their king find a way to end the war.

King Rytendenba IV was the third hereditary king to rule during the time of the Sleepless Wars (so named because of the humanoids' tactic of attacking in the small hours of the morning). His family suffered, his people suffered, and his capital was continually under repair; the end of this war was long overdue. Rytendenba's grandfather, Rytten, had tried beating the orcs and gnolls into a bloody pulp. Pursuing them into their own mountains was difficult and dangerous, and it produced far too many casualties. Lying in wait outside Uumaruu to attack the invaders met with moderate, but not stunning success. Rytendenba's father, Rytenden, had tried magical means of repelling the foul creatures. He ordered magical lights placed around the city's perimeter to blind the creatures that functioned poorly in daylight. He supervised magical wards to alert the city to impending attacks and designed magical traps to repel the gnolls and orcs. But these steps proved inconvenient to the elves, as well; the lights were disruptive, the wards were accidentally tripped by the citizens of Uumaruu, and a few elves were even caught in Rytenden's traps. These measures only prolonged the campaign; they did nothing to bring victory to the elves.

Thus, Rytendenba sought an answer to this century-

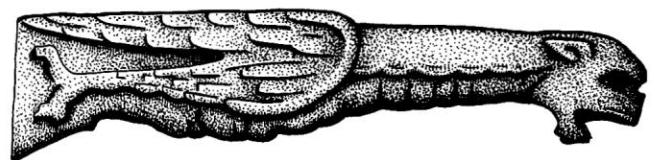
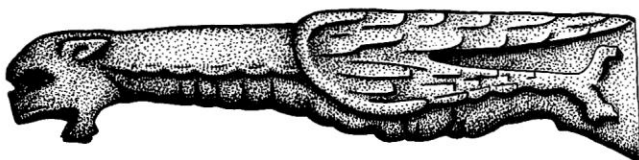
old nuisance. Because elves rely on cunning and the orcs and gnolls relied on brute strength, ending the war required a particular slant of military thinking. He met with the advisors of his father and grandfather, examining the tactics of his ancestors through the memories of their aides. He studied scouting reports about the gnolls and orcs, trying to determine the reason for their bloodthirst. What plagued Rytendenba most was that no reason for this war had ever been revealed. The foul creatures demanded nothing, won little, and went home wounded and empty-handed. Perhaps the beasts simply needed to wage war in order to be satisfied.

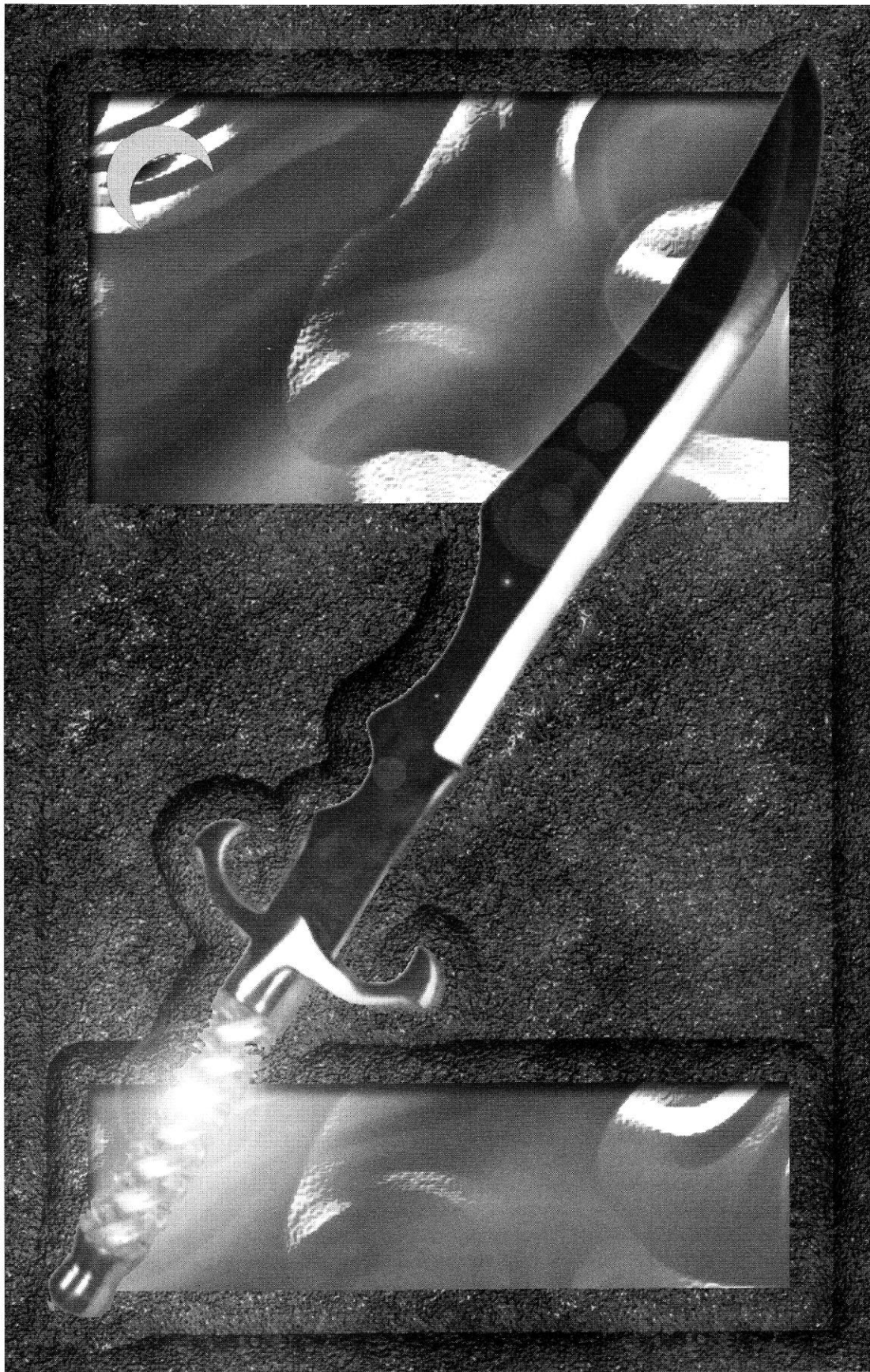
Finally, Rytendenba hit upon a plan. Through months of secret operations, disguises, and magical meddling, his court wizards managed to turn the gnolls and orcs upon each other, diverting the battles away from Uumaruu and upon the groll and orc encampments instead. The elves were overjoyed to be at peace, and the nasty mountain creatures could wage war on each other to their hearts' delight.

In celebration of his success, Rytendenba ordered a month-long festival of feasting and merriment. Music played in the streets night and day, neighborhoods rotated parties between homes, contests of skill were organized in the market square, and Rytendenba bestowed a basket of elven delicacies including wine, candied fruit, and sour berries upon every household. The celebration easily gained as much notoriety in the history of the realm as did the war itself.

For the first anniversary of the end of the Sleepless Wars, King Rytendenba commissioned from his wizards a special sword for himself and his heirs. The king wished to own a magical object, a sword, that would store the memories of its owner and allow them to be known to future heirs. His wizards worked long and hard, for such a thing had never before been created. They researched, experimented, tested, tinkered, and retested, and finally, just in time for the anniversary of the war's end, the wizards' efforts were rewarded. At a solemn ceremony, the wizards dedicated the sword and presented it to Rytendenba.

All who were present, including Rytendenba, fell to their knees at the mere sight of the blade. The wizards had fashioned it entirely of enchanted glass. As the sword was lifted in presentation to the king, the glass seemed to glow with an inner light. The sword's blade and pommel shimmered and seemed to flow like the surface of a slow, clear river. Every face present, every object in the room, and every beam of sunlight streaming in the windows was reflected in the glass, sending out a blinding brilliance to all present. The wizards performed an elaborate ritual over Rytendenba, attuning him to the powers of the sword. Finally, the wizards placed the sword in his

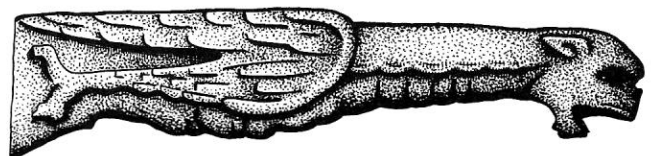
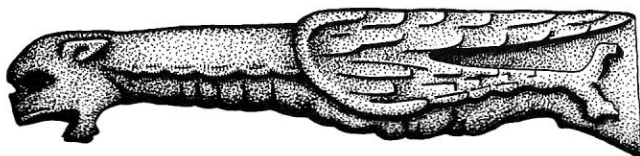




hands, forever binding his heirs to the wondrous blade. Rytendenba raised it high, proclaiming, "Peace to the elves forever!" and drawing a roaring cheer from all who looked on.

Rytendenba spent the next four days in private meetings with his court wizards. They instructed him in all the abilities and nuances of the sword. The wizards named the sword Pashymyarra, meaning "past, present, and future." The blade, as ordered by the king, could indeed store memories and allow them to be felt by another user. But a power such as this was new in the universe, and even the court wizards could not foresee all the quirks the blade would develop. Rytendenba learned from the wizards that the sword had indeed been fashioned of enchanted glass. Its magic prevented it from breaking even after being dropped from the highest spire in the city. But a sister blade, when swung in anger at an opponent, shattered into a thousand razor-sharp needles of glass when it struck its target. Thus, this sword, a symbol of war and combat, could never be wielded as a weapon.

The king also learned that he needed only to



be in contact with Pashymyarra in order for it to absorb his experiences. This need for immediate contact with the sword would allow Rytendenba to preserve his private moments, for the king could record only those events he wished to preserve. Also, the blade could not acquire Rytendenba's previous memories unless he held the blade and recited them aloud, as if dictating to a scribe. This, too, was a safeguard designed to allow the king to choose what the blade would absorb.

After working with his wizards and learning the intricacies of his new magical sword, Rytendenba decided that his subjects should enjoy the privilege of viewing the realm's newest treasure. He ordered a parade to be organized in honor of the realm's new treasure and in honor of the wizards who had created it.

The morning of the parade dawned chilly and bleak. The clerics assured the king that no rain would fall, so although the sky was overcast, the king ordered that the parade through the streets of Uumaruu would proceed.

As Rytendenba prepared to mount his horse, he handed Pashymyarra to his squire. As the king swung into his saddle, he heard a pained shriek and a sharp clatter. Looking down, he saw the sword lying on the ground and his squire writhing in pain. The youth's palms were so badly charred as to show bone beneath blackened flesh. The king screamed for his clerics to heal the squire and for his wizards to explain the mishap. It seemed, the wizards reasoned, that the sword was dangerous to anyone other than a wizard or a member of the royal family. Rytendenba demanded that steps be taken to prevent such an accident in the future.

The parade got underway, with the wizards who had fashioned Pashymyarra leading the event. Rytendenba followed them, holding the blade high for all to see. But toward the end of the parade, the sun broke through the thinning clouds and its rays fell upon the new sword. The powerful energy of the sun, channeled by the enchanted glass, streamed from the blade in blinding rays of light. Onlookers screamed, falling to the ground in pain. All who looked directly at the blazing sword, save Rytendenba, were immediately blinded. The king quickly wrapped the sword in his cloak and spurred his horse back to the palace. Rytendenba could feel the heat and energy of the blade through the fabric of his cloak, and by the time he reached the palace, the garment was merely a smoldering layer of ash.

The court wizards, spared from the blinding rays by their position at the head of the parade, reached the palace just as the king was placing the glowing sword in a dungeon cell. Rytendenba was furious. How could his wizards have made such a blunder? How could Pashymyarra be so dangerous?

The wizards explained the nature of the magic to their

king. They had been unable to bind the magic into a metal blade, although many swords were tried. The sand used to make the glass came from the floor of a chamber deep inside an abandoned dragon's lair, where it had been steeped in magical auras for many centuries.

Pashymyarra was powerful—more powerful than anything the wizards had ever seen before—but that power came with a few surprises. The wizards admitted that the blade had never before been struck by direct sunlight. And they admitted that the sword would likely exhibit other unexpected characteristics. From then on, king and wizards agreed, the blade would remain in the palace, or leave it only if locked in a protective chest.

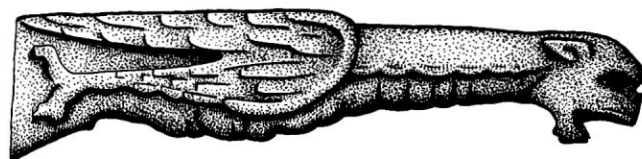
By the next morning, a relieved Rytendenba received word that all of his subjects had regained their eyesight—either naturally or through the talents of his clerics. The king felt fortunate that the blade had not caused a worse catastrophe.

Rytendenba continued to use Pashymyarra and learn its ways. The sword recorded events of his choosing perfectly, and the king learned to concentrate with the sword to recall specific events. His wizards designed a storage chest for transporting the sword, and a special armoire to keep it safe in the palace. Rytendenba, his family, and his subjects developed a healthy respect for the enchanted weapon, and the king lived out his reign without further accidents as a result of the sword's power.

Upon Rytendenba's passing, Pashymyarra was prepared for its new ruler. Many precautions were taken for the coronation ceremony and the transfer of the sword. Pashymyarra was soon presented to the new heir, Jarusell. The court wizards carefully performed the ritual linking the sword to the new king, performing each step with utmost precision. Jarusell eagerly accepted his grandfather's greatest treasure. Upon concentrating on the blade for the first time, however, Jarusell received a flood of intense memories from the sword. The shock was so great that the king immediately fell into a coma and remained in that state for six days.

The new king recovered completely, but the wizards were forced to take action. They determined that they must find a way to gradually attune a new heir to the complexities of the sword. Eventually, the wizards developed a program whereby all heirs to the throne began training with the sword upon reaching their tenth birthday.

Pashymyarra was handed down through several generations without incident. Then, about one thousand years after its creation, a terrible event transpired. At the coronation ceremony for Queen Wistilla, the sword was presented according to protocol, but a horrifying accident occurred. Some say an assassin stood in the midst of the onlookers. The court wizards believe that a spell to gather



sunlight into the room was cast, and the energy that blazed from the sword killed the new queen and two of the court wizards involved in the ceremony. Several others in the room were injured or blinded. Since that day, the ceremony to bind the new ruler to the sword has been performed privately, with only family and court wizards in attendance.

Roughly three hundred years later, the powers locked within Pashymyarra proved too tempting for a pair of young wizards who had just come to the court. Innocent handling of the sword, such as cleaning the blade, assisting the king, or securing the sword for storage, was perfectly safe for the court wizards. Never had one of them attempted to channel the sword's power.

Thus aware that the weapon was safe in the hands of practitioners of magic, the neophytes sneaked into the locked chamber that held the sword. Removing Pashymyarra from its locked and warded case, the pair breathlessly lay their hands upon it, expecting to experience a rush of power or memories within the sword. Energy surged from the artifact and into the young wizards. The pair who attempted to tap the sword's knowledge was eventually found, their hands still wrapped around the glass blade, their bodies blackened beyond recognition. The wizards of the court immediately took further measures to secure the sword after this incident; since that time, the sword is kept under constant guard when not in the king's possession.

Over the centuries, Pashymyarra has proven to be a constant challenge to the elf king and his court wizards. To assist future generations, the wizards have maintained detailed notes about the creation of the sword and the ritual to bind the sword to a new ruler. In addition, the wizards have recorded incidents such as Rytendenba's parade, all attempts to steal the artifact, and magical experiments performed upon the sword. Two such experiments have involved trying to purge an event from the sword's memory, and trying to link a second individual to the memories of the sword by being in direct contact with the king. Neither experiment has succeeded as yet.

The wizards have several volumes that are nothing more than a register of names of those who have stood in the presence of the sword. And for each new ruler, a volume is begun, chronicling his or her experiences with Pashymyarra—successful location of ideas or events, problems, side effects of use (exhaustion being the most common), and all observations pertaining to the sword. All totaled, more than 200 volumes are stashed away in the secret chambers belonging to the wizards of the elven court.

The tomes kept by the wizards record a number of seemingly random effects performed or channeled by the

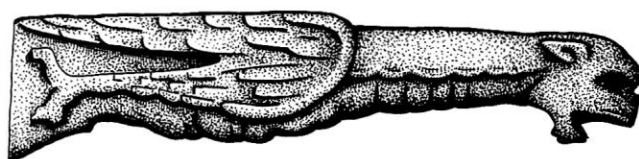
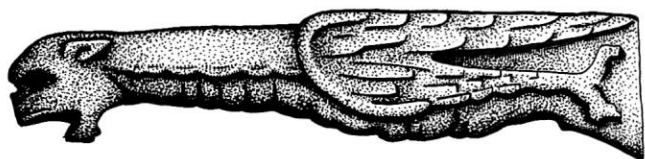
sword. Pashymyarra has proven to be a safeguard for the ruler of the elves on a number of occasions; once, while riding home in a blinding thunderstorm, the crate carrying the sword was struck by lightning at least six times without harm to the wagon, drivers, or horses carrying the crate. On another occasion, the sword repelled a barrage of magic missiles directed at the queen. The sword certainly has a strange affinity for light, heat, and electricity.

Since the sword's creation, the wizards of the realm have been wholly responsible for the safekeeping of Pashymyarra. Their volumes of notes are only one aspect of this important task. The wizards store and transport the sword safely, whether inside or outside the castle. At least one wizard is always in the presence of the sword, unless the king himself dismisses such a guardian. The wizards are also responsible for training future heirs in the use of the sword's powers. Most important of all, the court wizards perform the ritual that binds a new king to the sword. This ritual is rehearsed at least once a month so that a full contingent of wizards is ready for the ceremony at any given time.

Pashymyarra's power has multiplied over the centuries. It has stored the memories of elven rulers for a little over three millennia. Its wielders have the power to concentrate upon a specific event or time while holding the sword, and to experience the sights, sounds, thoughts, and emotions of that event or time. Elf rulers credit the sword with providing valuable advice, insight, and humor, and they know that the sword's information is perfect. On a few occasions, elf historians have beseeched a king or queen to provide information about a historical discrepancy; their respect for the blade is unsurpassed. And the subjects of the realm revere Pashymyarra almost as if it were a second king or a crown prince.

Should Pashymyarra ever be stolen or destroyed, an emotional blow would be struck to the kingdom. Centuries of important information would be lost forever. The scribes of the kingdom keep detailed accounts of the events of the realm, but no written text can ever compare to the direct observation of thoughts and events allowed by the sword. Fortunately, any attempt to use the sword without being magically bound to it will result in the user's death, meaning that the blade's information could not be used to the detriment of the kingdom.

As valuable as Pashymyarra is, the sword still carries unknown dangers that may manifest at any time. The wizards and rulers of the elves take the greatest precautions to prevent such a catastrophe, yet the risk remains. Despite its hidden dangers, this artifact is truly a centerpiece of elven life and the elven kings and queens.



Sword of Merellis

*May our Creator smile down upon you,
May our King find you worthy of his service,
May your brothers protect you,
And may our people praise you as champion and hero.*

— excerpt from the Knighting Ceremony of Polonia

A millennium has passed since the Age of Peace. During that great age, crops grew freely, neighbor helped neighbor, and the king's troubles were few. No wars scarred the land or buried its caretakers. No armies sharpened blades or lit torches for battle. No women wept for their lost homes and families, no children cried for lost mothers or fathers. That was not until the Century of Despair.

Peace seemed to flee overnight, like a fox escaping the rays of dawn. The horizon showed a smear of dark smoke, a sure sign of the coming evil. Those who saw it knew not where to flee or how to prepare. They gathered their families and locked their doors, not knowing what threatened them, what terrors would bear down upon them.

The thunder of hooves drew near just before the evening dark, a low, menacing pounding that shook homes and barns and frightened all in its path. The men on their horses swept down as the sun's last rays disappeared. These were huge, ugly men with unruly black hair and beards, dirty gray teeth, cold eyes, and huge gnarled hands. They swung jagged blades and spiked clubs, hurled rocks and sharpened sticks, and trampled anything unfortunate enough to be in their way. Destruction and death settled, then rose like a vapor, a wisp of horrid memory.

The castle defended itself well, although it had never suffered an assault before. It repelled the invaders after two days of attack, then braced for the return of the horde.

The king and the people of Polonia found themselves preparing for war, something they knew nothing about. They prepared weapons and tools for fighting, created simple armor, and saddled their horses. They prepared every kind of defense they could imagine. The king summoned anyone with ideas for protecting the realm, sending criers far and wide, then met with those whose ideas held promise.

Despite their lack of training and weaponry, the castle refused to fall, saving the kingdom of Polonia from takeover. Villages and crops were burned and many lives were lost, but the kingdom stood fast. After half a dozen years of fighting, the invaders were finally repelled for good.

Polonia had changed forever. No longer were its subjects free of worry. Every household now kept a sword or dagger for defense, and a secret cache of food in case of attack. Citizens nervously scanned the horizon now and then, watching for the telltale black smoke that once warned them of coming danger. And Polonia's people taught each other and even their children to swing a blade or fire a bow in battle, to defend themselves and their families.

Polonia's king saw that he faced an entirely new duty: protecting his realm and its future. He summoned a small group of men who had fought bravely against the invasion and granted them the exalted positions of knights of the realm. Then he directed them to equip the castle for its future defense. One knight was given charge of fortifying the castle and its grounds. Another pursued craftsmen who could perfect techniques for forging weapons. A third selected horses and directed their training, a fourth gathered feathers for fletching, and a fifth gathered those who could invent and master techniques for designing armor.

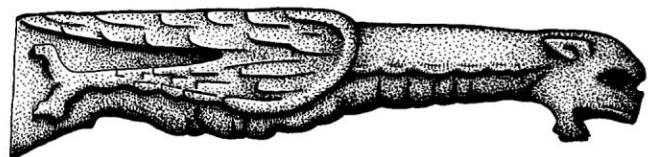
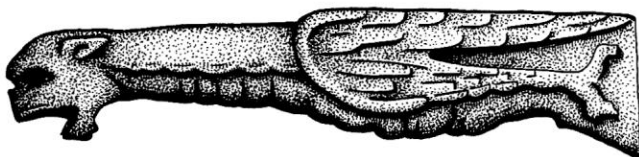
And so it went, with the king's knights undertaking the new study of warfare. Their preparations were not in vain, for within a few years, a new menace bore down upon the small kingdom.

This time, under cover of darkness, an army of goblins swarmed out of the hills and attacked the villages nearest them. Although the attack was a surprise, the Polonians had prepared themselves for an assault and fought bravely. They fought with all the fury born of the fear of the horde that had attacked them last, and they cut down goblins swiftly. The villagers surprised themselves as well as the goblins, repelling the monstrous invaders and inflicting terrible casualties upon them and losing less than a handful of their own fighting men.

The success was exhilarating for these villages and the entire kingdom. The king's knights pursued their duties with new enthusiasm, and new men were added to the honored group. The king wished that each county of the kingdom would eventually be home to a learned knight to see to matters of defense and training at a greater distance from the castle.

Unfortunately, the knights themselves fell to squabbling about who among them was the greatest. One argued that weapons were more important than armor, while a third claimed that castle readiness surpassed all other needs. Seeing this, the king determined to put an end to the bickering. He declared a contest to be held for each of his knights to determine the greatest among them. The ten best contestants would be assigned to a new group of elite knights, while the rest would keep their honored positions.

The king and queen concocted a series of tests, each



taken on a different day over the course of a week. The first tested the men's riding skills, requiring them to follow an intricate obstacle course. The second tested their knowledge of the realm, asking the men to name locations in the kingdom using a series of maps. The third test measured the men's skill in sword fighting. On the fourth day, the knights fought each other barehanded. On day five, the men took a lengthy exam testing their memory and logic. Day six brought tests of survival, such as finding their direction and starting a fire. Day seven required them to rescue a victim from a series of traps, and at the end of the event, the winners were announced.

Of the thirty or so knights who competed, the ten best and brightest were named to the king's new elite team known as the Knights of the Shining Sword. They were all named to oversee new areas important to the defense of the realm. And their prize for their success was the opportunity to work with the master smiths and each design their own personal sword as a symbol of their status.

The knights and the smiths worked eagerly together, designing new blades and inventing new techniques for improved weapons. A year later, when all the swords had been completed, the new blades were presented to their owners in an elaborate ceremony in the castle along with a blessing by all the clerics of the realm.

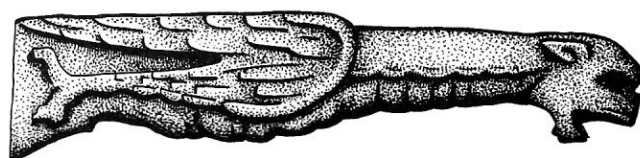
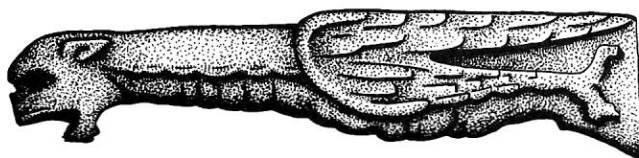
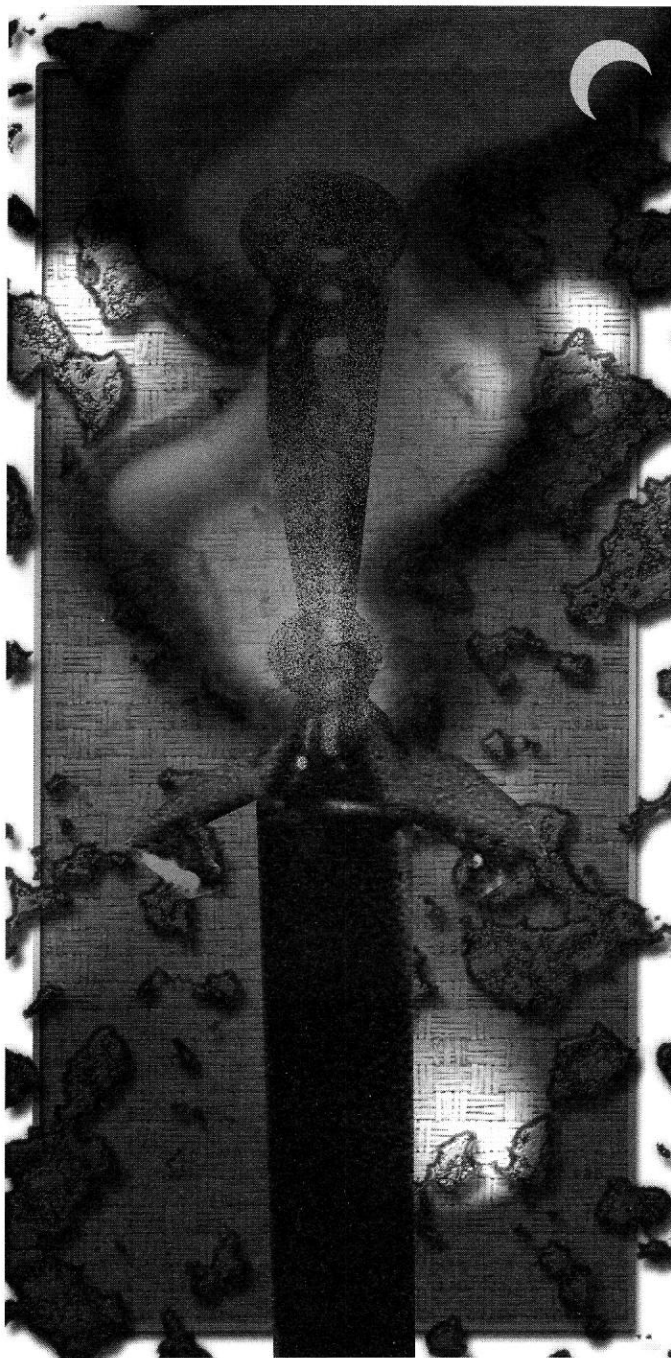
Polonia's castle ran more smoothly after the competition, for each knight knew his place as a result of the contests. The bickering subsided and the important work of preparing the kingdom against attacks was accomplished more efficiently. The king was so pleased that he ordered

an annual ceremony to recognize his knights and bless them for their efforts. In addition, he ordered that the contest be held every three years in order to keep his knights at their best. Those who fell from the Knights of the Shining Sword were allowed to keep their personal weapon, and those who joined the squad for the first time were rewarded with chances to design their own sword.

Not long after the second competition, war again came to Polonia. The barbarian horde returned again, this time with more men and a pack of trained wolves. They assaulted a number of villages and eventually made their way to the castle. The knights had done their jobs well, however, and the castle was easily defended. The knights and army were equipped with the realm's finest weapons and armor, and all were well trained. The barbarians lost scores of men in the siege, but Polonia lost no more than two dozen in the defense of the castle. The terrible horde of barbarians, including its

enormous slaving wolves, was turned from the realm once again.

When the dust had settled, the king was saddened to



learn that one of those lost was an elite knight named Merellis. He had won his position as a Knight of the Shining Sword in the very first competition, and he was the first of their number to be lost. The king ordered a special crypt constructed far below the castle, and Merellis was laid to rest with his personal sword. The king also ordered that each year, at the ceremony of sword blessing, Merellis's sword should be brought forth to honor his memory and remind his knights of those who had come before them. Merellis's sword would also serve to symbolize those knights who would eventually be entombed in greatest honor alongside the first fallen knight.

Polonia fought a number of small wars over the next two centuries, and succeeded in defending its castle and holding its ground. The Knights of the Shining Sword continued their traditional contests and ceremonies, and their ranks shifted and grew. And each year, the sword of Merellis was brought forth from its regal resting place for blessings and prayers from all the knights of the elite squad.

The Knights of the Shining Sword continued their traditions and duties for centuries to come. Their skill at weapon and armor design grew, and their understanding of the techniques of war improved. The knights fully earned their reputation as the finest defenders of the land, so much so that other kingdoms eyed their skill enviously. Their efforts were truly responsible for the safekeeping of Polonia.

Then the days of the Clanging Wars arrived. In mid-spring, a great army on horseback rode in from behind the eastern hills on a path directly for Polonia's castle. It ignored farms and villages in its path and pointed itself toward the kingdom's greatest city. Word quickly reached the capital, and in orderly fashion a legion of well-skilled, well-led soldiers rode out to meet these new mounted enemies.

Polonia's troops, while well trained, were not prepared for the army that faced them. Its riders, armed with lances, rode at them full speed, sending the bewildered troops scattering. Hundreds of arrows rained down on their heads. This new enemy fought with the sharpest blades, armor-cleaving polearms, and cruel morning stars. Reinforcements arrived to assist Polonia's soldiers, but the army suffered great losses. The king's army retreated back to the castle to make defense within its thick walls, and the new enemy camped on the plains outside the city.

Scouts soon reported that the foreign army was hard at work building a number of wooden contraptions, the likes of which none of them had ever seen. After their initial assault, no additional attacks came from the camped forces for several days. The king and his knights were

bewildered.

Soon, a series of attacks began on the castle. From within their walls, Polonia's troops defended themselves well, firing flaming arrows, hurling rocks, and hacking away at enemies who attempted to scale the walls. Several units of men were stationed outside the walls to protect the gates. For several days the defense went well, and the Polonians thought they could hold out against the new enemy.

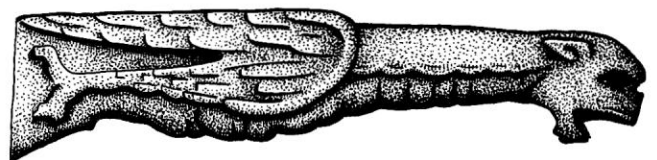
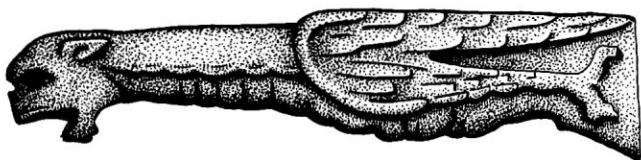
Then the siege engines rolled in. The enemy forces had built a machine designed to hurl huge boulders at their walls, and bricks crumbled under the impact. They brought in battering rams to assault the gates, and Polonia's troops barely managed to hold them off. The new enemy brought with it a number of destructive and deadly machines that threatened to level the castle in a matter of days.

Meanwhile, the king received news that four Knights of the Shining Sword had been killed while defending the city. He needed to appoint new knights to fill their positions immediately. Choosing his four best men from the rank and file, the king quickly promoted them and sent them into combat.

The very next day, the king learned that two more Knights had been killed, and he quickly chose men to fill their places. The castle was rocked by boulder strikes, equipment was running low, and morale was sinking quickly. The situation had grown truly dire. Villagers were arriving from every corner of the kingdom, but they were unable to get through the besiegers to reach the castle. The king feared that his realm would be conquered and his people annihilated.

Then, in a moment of inspiration (or desperation), the king ordered that the sword of Merellis be retrieved from the crypt. The king regarded the holy blade carefully, for it had lain in the crypt for over four hundred years. While a fine sword, it was no equal to the steel the realm currently produced. But the weapon was a symbol of Polonia's success and endurance that all the people respected, so the king presented the sword to his newest Knight of the Shining Sword, with orders that he use it to rally his fellows.

The new knight, named Raonor, was filled with awe at the presentation of the blade. With trepidation, he accepted the king's orders, mounted his horse and rode into the castle courtyard. As he handled the gently curved blade, he realized that it was inferior to his own sword, and he feared it might not survive a battle. But to turn down such a responsibility and the command of the king was unthinkable. Taking a deep breath, Raonor whispered a prayer to his god and asked that Merellis guide his hand. Then he raised the sword high and galloped through the courtyard.



"The sword of Merellis will guide us!" he cried. "The sword of Merellis will guide us!" Those who filled the courtyard stared for a moment, then took up the cheer themselves. They turned to their duties with renewed strength, firing arrows, shoring up walls, tending horses, and repairing blades. The gates were clear for the moment, so Raonor and the few companions who rallied around him rode out onto the plains to assist their brothers in battle.

They first reinforced a unit of infantry outnumbered threefold. As Raonor arrived swinging the sword of Merellis, his fellows doubled their efforts, swinging madly and striking deadly wounds against the enemy with nearly every blow. The infantrymen managed to turn the fight in their favor, and eventually routed the unit that had threatened to decimate them.

Raonor and his new unit of infantry then surprised a unit of enemy cavalry by charging them from behind while occupied with another of Polonia's units. Again, the combat weary soldiers of Polonia fought as if fresh to the battle, dispatching the besieging enemy warriors with great haste.

For several days, Raonor moved from battle to battle, without even stopping for rest. As his men tired, Raonor found a new group to inspire and led them to assist their fellows. Even Raonor's steed was unfatigued by day after day of battle.

Finally, the knight could see that the balance of power had shifted. Weapons, armor, and bodies littered the plains around the castle as far as the eye could see. It was difficult to determine the course of the entire battle from his vantage point, but he saw only a few enemy camps dotted the far hills, but the castle itself had remained secure. Raonor rode to the castle to learn if his eyes told the truth.

Raonor found the king and a few advisors in an excited meeting. Several enemy units in the countryside had been routed or destroyed. Those assaulting the castle had fallen back, camping in the far hills. No battles currently raged on the castle's plains, and it seemed that all Polonia needed to do was flush the enemy from her borders. Somehow, they had rallied to repel the invaders.

Those in the war room were all but speechless. Somehow, they had accomplished the impossible, or so it seemed. But all agreed to proceed with caution in the event of some grand enemy trick.

The Knights of the Shining Sword were each ordered to muster a unit of soldiers and systematically sweep the countryside, repelling any enemies who remained within. The remaining knights, as well as many infantry and cavalry units, were kept at the castle to defend it in case of a sneak attack. But two weeks after the Knights set out on their mission, they returned to the castle to find that no

new battles had been waged. Polonia had defended herself once again.

A great celebration was held in honor of the victory. Many tales were told of Raonor arriving in battle bearing the sword of Merellis, and each tale ended with Polonia's troops victorious. At a fabulous state dinner attended by all the nobility of the land, the king told the story of summoning the sword from the crypt in the hope of rallying Polonia's beleaguered troops.

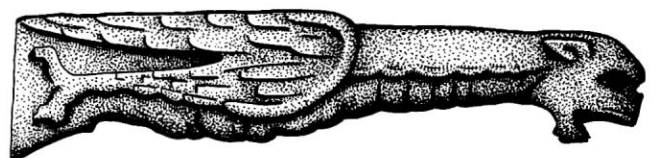
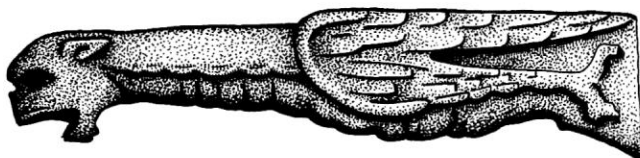
All listened eagerly as the king told his story. When he had learned that six of the Knights of the Shining Sword had been killed, he saw that his realm was about to be lost. He longed to summon past Knights from their crypts, but of course, this was impossible. Then he thought about the sword of Merellis and the promise it held for the people of Polonia. If ever there were a time to tap the many blessings placed upon the sword over the centuries, this was it.

So the king ordered that the sword be retrieved and he presented it to his newest knight with the command to save his kingdom. And Raonor rode forth bravely to do just that.

Raonor arose amid deafening cheers and told his bit of the tale. He admitted his fear at wielding the blade of legend, and his concern for fighting with a somewhat fragile weapon. But he also described the thrill of inspiring his fellows, dispatching the enemy, and watching the invaders flee Polonia's borders. He felt as if Merellis himself had ridden with him in battle during those difficult days.

After numerous speeches and congratulations, the king brought forth the sword of Merellis one more time, raising a painful but joyous din from those in attendance. The king announced that the sword of Merellis would be replaced in its crypt and brought forth every year just as tradition demanded. And he told Raonor that as a new Knight of the Shining Sword, he would be allowed to design his own personal blade, but for the first time, he would be allowed to choose a duplicate of the sword of Merellis if he wished. Raonor considered his options for barely a single heartbeat and informed the king that nothing would make him more proud.

Polonia had once again repelled invaders and peace reigned in the land once again. A year after the war's end, Raonor and the other new Knights of the Shining Sword were presented with their personal weapons in a ceremony grander than ever. The sword of Merellis was placed on display as always, and those who stood in its presence claimed that they could feel the power of the sword simply by standing near it. The sword has remained safely stored in Merellis's crypt ever since, and its annual blessing ceremonies have grown in reverence with each passing year.



Wind of Discord

...and the goddess spoke, and said unto the men, "Why do you follow me here? You have trespassed on my realm, killed my loyal followers, injured my servants and even dared to invade my presence."

The men answered, saying, "We follow the Rules of Law. We seek the good of all, while you destroy all who come before you. Our lord seeks to build a lawful kingdom while you continually seek to tear it down. You, to whom destruction is as natural as breath, are anathema to us and must be destroyed."

At this, the goddess Ayera's eyes blazed brightly, her eyes filled with the heat of a thousand fires. She stood, revealing all her terrible glory to the intruders, and allowed them to glimpse the awesome powers she held at bay. "Look on me, children of Losri! You are little more than children in the night, frightened by that which you cannot comprehend! You think to banish me from your lives, to sleep soundly with no fear of what the next day will bring. Foolish babes! You know not that which you contemplate."

"Without me, your lives would have no meaning, as bland and boring as a winter sky. Were you to succeed, that Rule of Law you covet so deeply would be as a millstone, pressing down upon your chest until it crushed the life from your very body!"

The men cowered before her, belatedly aware of the power they had wished to extinguish. They fell to their knees in fear of the goddess and her might, all but one. His name was Taron; he alone saw the fury of the goddess and found it beautiful. He stared into her ageless face and found wonder there instead of fear, hope instead of death.

Ayera raised her hand to smite the trespassers, but stopped when she saw Taron. She read his soul in his eyes and stayed her hand. "You," she said. "What do you see?"

"Everything," said Taron.

Ayera smiled then, the smile of the sun as it breaks free from the earth. "Then serve me."

Taron dropped to his knees, but his eyes were fixed on his goddess. "Until my death."

Ayera waved her hand, banishing the other men back to their homes and away from her celestial palace. She took on mortal seeming, so that Taron might not be harmed. She walked alongside him, leading him through her ever-changing home. There he saw life in all its wondrous variety, existing alongside death and destruction as twin babes suckling at Ayera's breast. He saw the Wheel of Fate slowly spinning out its course. He saw the Sphere of Time and the Pit of Destruction. He saw the Twin

Chalices, each pouring out its measure of good and ill upon the world in turn.

Taron stayed in the home of the goddess for time beyond the measure of mortal men. Finally, Ayera appeared before him, holding a sword. The sword was like none seen in the world before. Its hilt was purest starlight wrapped with the golden light of the sun made solid, with the goddess's crown at the base. The blade was a river of silver moonlight, twisting in the same sinuous curves as his goddess's hair.

Taron knelt before the goddess Ayera, kissing the hem of her flowing gown.

"Rise, Taron," she said. "Do you still wish to serve me among men?"

Taron stood and said, "Eternally, my goddess."

"Then this sword, Elcheminor, is yours." She held the blade in her outstretched hands, and it radiated both light and darkness, as beautiful and terrible as she was herself. "This sword is a part of me, just as all things are in their time. It will seek out my enemies and defeat them, just as they sought to destroy me." Taron fell again to one knee in subservience, but Ayera could see that the joy had left his eyes. "Speak, oh beloved. Do you change your mind?"

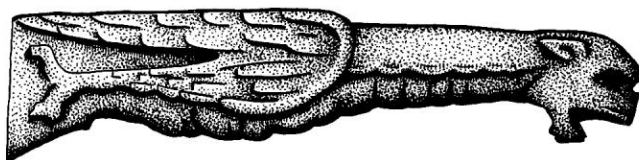
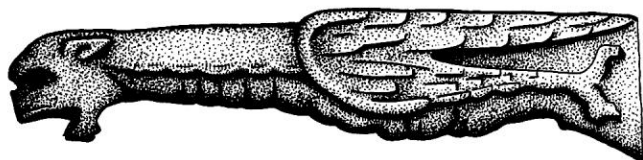
"No, my goddess. It is just that the soul of man is weak and fearful. Being so much below the gods in stature and birth, our bodies are as frail as our spirits. Men are changeable; many would fear you less if they understood you better. Tell me, must I act as the agent of their destruction?"

Ayera stood still, looking down upon her servant. When at last she spoke, she smiled. "As rage is mine, so is mercy. Use this weapon to fight my true enemies, the servants of Losri. Mankind is spared, but Losri's own are mine to destroy. Teach your sisters and brothers my ways, and keep them mindful of the need of me. They deny me at their peril."

— From the *Book of Taron*, the principal holy text of the Yeric religion

The band of heroes stood at the gates, ready to face their enemy: brave Kieroth, leader of men and fierce in battle; black-eyed Awrun, master of the sword; steadfast Melkoth and his wondrous horn; wise Ephisy with his eldritch fire; and youthful Taron, child of Light and Kieroth's son. With fire and sword they forced their way in, shedding the blood of inhuman creatures of all descriptions; angel and demon, dead and living, and some beings that had never before been seen by man.

Leaving a trail of monstrous blood, they carved their way through the bodies of foul Ayera's servants. No creature that dared stand against them lived; no barrier that





barred their way remained standing. The strength of their destiny flowed through them, charging the very air they breathed with power.

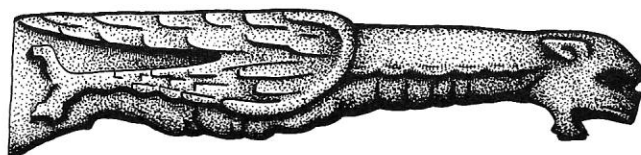
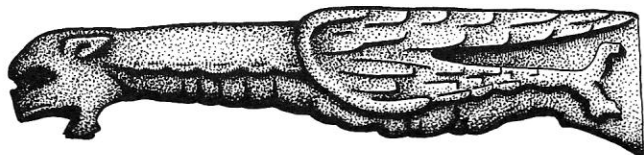
At last, they came upon a cavernous room, with only a single chair within its walls. On that chair sat a beautiful woman, wearing robes of shifting color that dazzled the eye. It was she, Ayera, destroyer of all; Cursebearer, Life-ender. The goddess betrayed no sympathy for the creatures that had been killed in her stead, nor surprise at finding mortal men so deep within her sanctum. Instead she raged, like a rabid cat, spewing words as venomous as the snakes in her hair.

"Hold, Ayera, Goddess of Discord. We have come to rid ourselves of your tyranny!" Kieroth shouted, his voice echoing through the empty hall. His brown mane of hair was wild from battle, and the blood of demons painted his skin. "No longer shall you steal our crops, our chil-

dren, our lives!"

The goddess smiled, cracking the skin of her face until her human visage was completely eradicated. She stood from her throne, revealing her true form. Her skin was mottled with every color under the sun, as though disease had been born there. Her hands grew claws, and her hair became serpents. Her gown disappeared as bat-like wings sprang from her shoulders in a mockery of all that is good. Her eyes became pits of fire, and darkness radiated from her just as a torch brings forth light.

Ephisys's hands glowed with purple fire, and bolts of light sparked forth from his fingers. Melkoth knocked the Silver Arrow, its light making mockery of the Serpent Queen's darkling aura. Awrun shook back his black hair from his face and advanced, both blades glowing as though bewitched. Kieroth stood with his hammer and shield, ready to charge. But Taron, bold Taron, strode



heedlessly forward into the Serpent Queen's grasp.

As Taron stepped forward, anxious to shield his companions from Ayera's fury with the power of Losri's Law, he unwarily looked up into her face. Kieroth cried out a warning to his son, but the foolish lad was unable to heed it. He simply stood there, entranced as he gazed deeply into the eyes of the Serpent Queen. Kieroth gestured for the others to hold their attacks as Taron walked slowly forward, ensorcelled as he was by the grim goddess's powers.

Ayera smiled at Kieroth and sat back in her chair, her abhorrent wings stretched wide. Taron stood as though carved from stone, with only the merest flutter of his breast to give evidence of life. She looked back at Taron and smiled before inclining her head slowly.

At the signal, Taron turned slowly to face his father. His eyes were blank and unseeing, and Kieroth's heart fell at the sight. The Serpent Queen spoke, her voice deceptively kind. "Taron, what do you see?"

"Everything," the boy answered. Intelligence returned to his expression, and he turned his head until his gaze rested on Kieroth's face.

"Taron, come back to me," whispered Kieroth, pleading with his son. Ephysis began to mutter arcane phrases under his breath while Melkoth moved near to the mage, to cover his efforts. Ayera raised a clawed finger into the air as her serpents hissed, and Taron groaned and crumpled to his knees.

"No!" Kieroth ran to Ephysis and clutched his sleeve, forcing the wizard to drop the spell. Melkoth lowered his bow as well, and the four of them watched silently as Taron straightened, but did not rise.

Ayera lowered her hand, smiling cruelly. The Serpent Queen's form changed yet again, to that of a beautiful woman with hair like silver rain and wings of bronze. "Then serve me, Taron."

"Until my death," answered the youth.

Kieroth cried out in rage and pain as he watched Taron stand and walk to her side. It took all Awrun's strength to hold Kieroth back, so desperate was the brown-haired warrior to avenge his son. As Kieroth strained against Awrun's arms, the Serpent Queen smiled and gently stroked Taron's hair. She whispered something in the unhappy youth's ear, and Taron smiled—a smile that froze the hearts of his companions.

Taron began chanting then, and the voice of the Serpent Queen joined with his, filling the entire room with harsh, sibilant sounds. Ephysis could sense the magical energies gathering, and so he called out to Awrun and Melkoth, laying hands on Kieroth and Awrun and as Melkoth touched the wizard's shoulder. Kieroth sensed what Ephysis was about to do and redoubled his efforts to break free. Before the warrior could break his bonds,

however, Ephysis called out a single arcane word.

A brilliant light flashed, and the group of heroes vanished. They reappeared in Cjerynar, the stronghold of Losri's power in the North—and Taron's former home. Kieroth fell to the ground overcome by emotion as the others stood by helplessly. Though the group sought the aid of Losri's priests, as well as searching for the way back to the Serpent Queen's home, they were unable to find their way back and retrieve Kieroth's son. And yet, many years later, they did find Taron again, bearing the sword "Lawbreaker" in the lands of mortal men. But that is another tale...

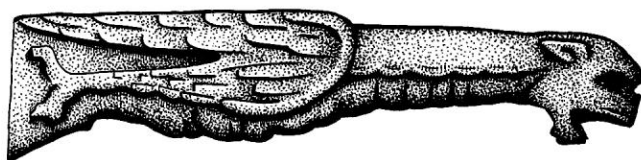
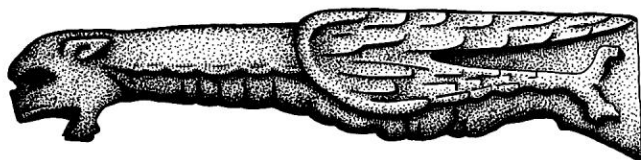
— "The Legend of Taron's Fall," from *Tales of Bardic Glory*, collected by Erigan the Chanter, Official Storyteller of the Ducal Court

It was in the year 3412 that Taron Lawbreaker came once more among the realms of mortal man. He returned a man full-grown and in the prime of health, nearing thirty years of age at most. Taron, now fully grown, bore a startling resemblance to his father, the famed warrior Kieroth Vornithul. He wore a sword of great power, which we have since dubbed "Eriskul"—meaning Chaos-bringer.

When Taron left our order, it was as a promising young cleric of Losri, determined to bring the civilizing influence of law to those otherwise doomed to spend their lives overwhelmed by violence and chaos. I was the one who placed the holy Book of Law in his hands; I was the one who heard his arguments on behalf of the penitent who strayed. I had high hopes for his future, for he was one who understood that the law was given for the good of those who lived under its rule—not the other way around.

When Kieroth came to me after losing Taron, the news hit me as though my own son had been lost. What arrogance, for Kieroth to believe that mortal men could kill a goddess! I believed then, and still do, that their hubris in ignoring the distinctions between mortal and deity powers caused Kieroth's loss, forcing Taron to be sacrificed in order to keep balance. But what a fate, for one so devoted to Losri to be lost utterly to the goddess of Discord! Still, I digress.... Taron returned that year, coming straightway here to Cjerynar with the sword in hand. Before anyone could recognize him—even before seeing his father or his old companions—he came to me.

I had just finished my evening ritual when I felt a cold draft through the room. I noticed it at once, because my chamber is particularly sealed against such damaging influences. When I turned, I saw him there, dressed in garishly colored clothing with his shirt half-undone and



the sword at his side. His long mane of dark auburn hair made me almost mistake him for his father, but then he smiled and called me Uncle, and I knew.

I felt moved to embrace him, but seeing the easy manner with which he rested his hand upon the sword hilt restored my caution. Instead, I clasped his hand and bid him be seated. I half-expected the old ritual obeisance that was proper between our priestly ranks, but I saw in a moment that those days were gone.

I gently asked if he had returned seeking sanctuary and healing, to remove the affliction with which he suffered. Sadly, he refused my offer of help, though I had expected little else. Had it been anyone else, I would have attempted to compel him...but I somehow felt that to do so would end disastrously. I chose instead to simply offer him tea.

Taron then related a fascinating, if ultimately questionable, tale of his time spent with the Serpent Queen. He even allowed me to seek guidance from Losri as to the veracity of his tale. I was intrigued to find that there was some truth to his ravings, though knowing how much is truly real and how much he has been convinced of is nigh unto impossible.

When he had finished, I sat silent for some time. I knew my duties to the Law and the priesthood, but still my nature warred with me at being forced to such a state of affairs with one I had regarded as almost my own child. I feared Taron's reaction, and I knew that he must have been expecting my next actions. At last, however, my conscience would let me rest no longer.

After ascertaining Taron's health and well being (as much as I was able given the circumstances), I told him that he must return to his duties. He was sworn to Losri's service as a boy, and it was in that service that he belonged. I further instructed him that he would call upon his father as soon as his penance to the Law was completed, whereupon he could continue his ministry if he so chose.

To my great shock and continuing horror, he just laughed.

Taron stood then, and drew the sword from its scabbard. The item, much to my astonishment, began to speak to me in a most insulting fashion and making clear the abhorrence it felt for my avocation, my suggestion, and my god. I was frankly shocked at the audacity of the item, and only my conviction that it was an item of god-imbued powers kept me silent.

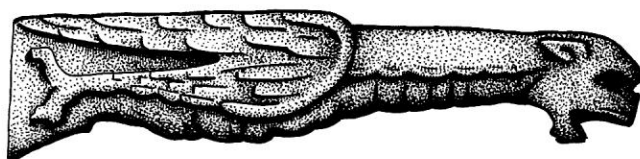
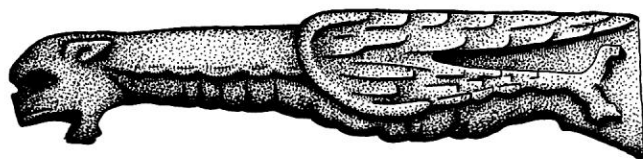
Taron commanded the sword to be silent, then went on to tell me that he could not, in good conscience, serve Losri again. He had served the Law from duty, but now he served Ayera from love. He explained that he meant no harm to me or my faith, but that he intended to oppose us and strengthen the faith of the goddess. He told me that no man would come to harm from he or his sword unless they wished it so. I wish that his word could still be believed.

After he left me that night, it is my understanding that he met with his father (though Kieroth refuses to discuss the meeting, even with me). I made Taron's status as Oath- and Lawbreaker known across the order as required, even though doing so gave me only sorrow. How can a man with such devotion become all that he once opposed?

Not long after he left me, I began to hear tales of creatures, both good and ill, that were killed by a man with a sword matching Eriskul's description. He struck without any seeming discretion, except that those beings killed were of types considered allied with Losri. In our strongest cities where law flourishes, there have also come to be a surprising number of mishaps of late—especially involving people who claim the Yeric faith (a substantial increase over previous years). Can it be that Taron is truly involved in these crimes? Is the boy I knew the man we now fear? Only the gods know for certain, and yet I fear for what I suspect.

I can only pray that he answers justice with a clean heart.

—From the journal of Justicar Eleram Uritan, priest of Losri, dated 12 Soru, 3445



Demonhunter

Years ago Falendaar was covered in a rich forest. In those days, the elves knew of the existence of evil but did not feel its touch. There were only a few hundred elves in the woods and they lived in peace. One day during the warm spring season, an outsider came to the forest. He was a stranger, though he walked among the people as an elf. He did not speak of his past, but he sought the friendship of the elves. His fair skin, golden hair, and melodious voice convinced the elves of Falendaar that all was well with him. They welcomed the stranger into their homes and shared their bounty with him.

For five and twenty years this outsider in elven form stayed among the people. He learned their ways and he found his way into the hearts and minds of those who knew him. When the elves of Falendaar had every confidence in his good will, he began to court an elven maid. She was fair and slight and quick of mind. He told her tales of other times and other lands. His words found her heart and clung there. When he had spoken enough, the weight of his words was such that her heart was heavy with them. She felt disappointment and regret at life in Falendaar. She who had never known unhappiness in her home became unhappy, and her only solace was found with him who had corrupted her.

Mistaking her sorrow for life and its relief for love, the elf maid agreed to become the outsider's wife. A grand ceremony was held and the elves celebrated the union. They could not know what was to come of it. The maid, feeling that now her sorrow would be banished for all time, felt happy beyond reason. When she discovered she was with child her joy was increased three-fold. She was certain that she had found her place and her destiny. She found happiness and hope for the many centuries of her life yet to come.

Before the child came, the mother was already lost to the influence of evil. She suspected the nature of her husband. When her child was born with the wings of a bat, she knew. The child's name was Zalikar and he was of mixed blood, both elf and demon. She had married an incubus, a demon who exists to tempt and torment mortals. The incubus used her fear and her love, as well as his own magic, to keep her under his control. They continued living with the elves of Falendaar. The child grew and used a ring given to him by his father to hide among the elves. The others knew him as Heillan Noonflower, but his true name was Zalikar.

For a century or more the incubus, his corrupted wife, and their child Zalikar lived among the elves of Falendaar. In the end, however, such illusions must always end. As he grew, Zalikar's cruelty grew as well.

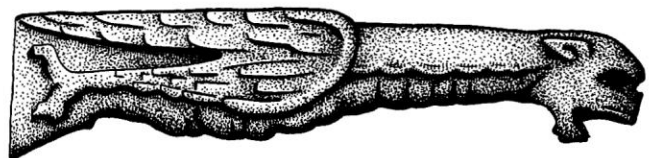
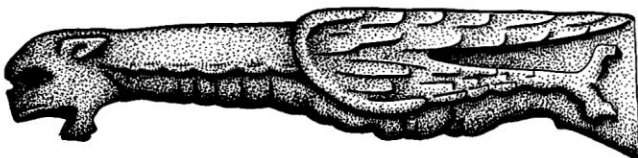
He became brutal and unforgiving. The elves began to push him away, both fearing and loathing what the boy had become. The harder the people pushed him away, the more Zalikar resented and hated those who feared him. Finally, weary of his ruse and ready to come into his birthright, Zalikar concocted a plan to murder all the elves that lived around him.

The elf maid knew the source of the death and evil plaguing her homeland. She sought to stop her child from destroying what the elves held dear. She confronted him while they were alone. She pleaded with him to leave the others be, to show mercy to the peaceful elves of Falendaar. Zalikar grew angry at his mother's interference. He screamed at his mother about the betrayal he felt and about the fear that the others had for him. He relished in their fear and hers. In the end, full of rage and bloodlust, he murdered her. The incubus watched the scene unfold and felt pleasure. Zalikar had become all that his father had hoped.

With the mother dead and the child following in his footsteps, the incubus felt his work was done. He bade farewell to Zalikar, though he left his son with hints about how to find his father and his demon kindred. He abandoned the mortal plane and returned home to the Abyss. The elves blamed Zalikar for the few deaths that had been visited upon them, though they still did not know his true nature. The elves rose up together to combat what they felt was evil, arming themselves with hunting weapons and magic. Zalikar was forced away from his home by the angry mob. He fled Falendaar and blamed the elves for his banishment. He hated them all the more for the necessity of his flight.

The elf-demon Zalikar disappeared from all known history for a time. When he returned two-score years later he was much grown in power. Like the demonic force he was he attacked his old home. He used darkness, confusion, poison, and fear to divide and frighten the people. He slipped through the forest at night and slew without mercy, hunting down and destroying those he felt had turned against him. During the course of a single winter, all of the elves of Falendaar were killed or had abandoned their home. With the coming of the new spring, Zalikar burned the woods to the ground. Finally he felt revenged upon the elves who had mistrusted and wronged him since his birth. Their weakness was their end, and through their deaths he saw his own strength.

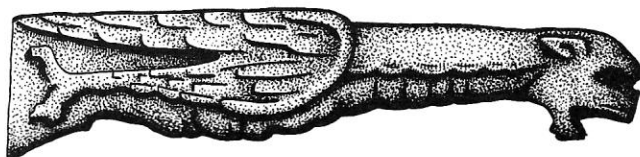
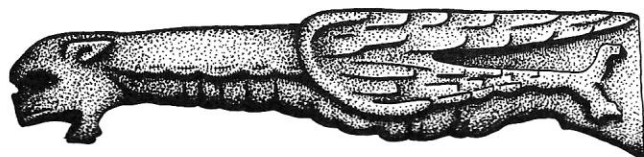
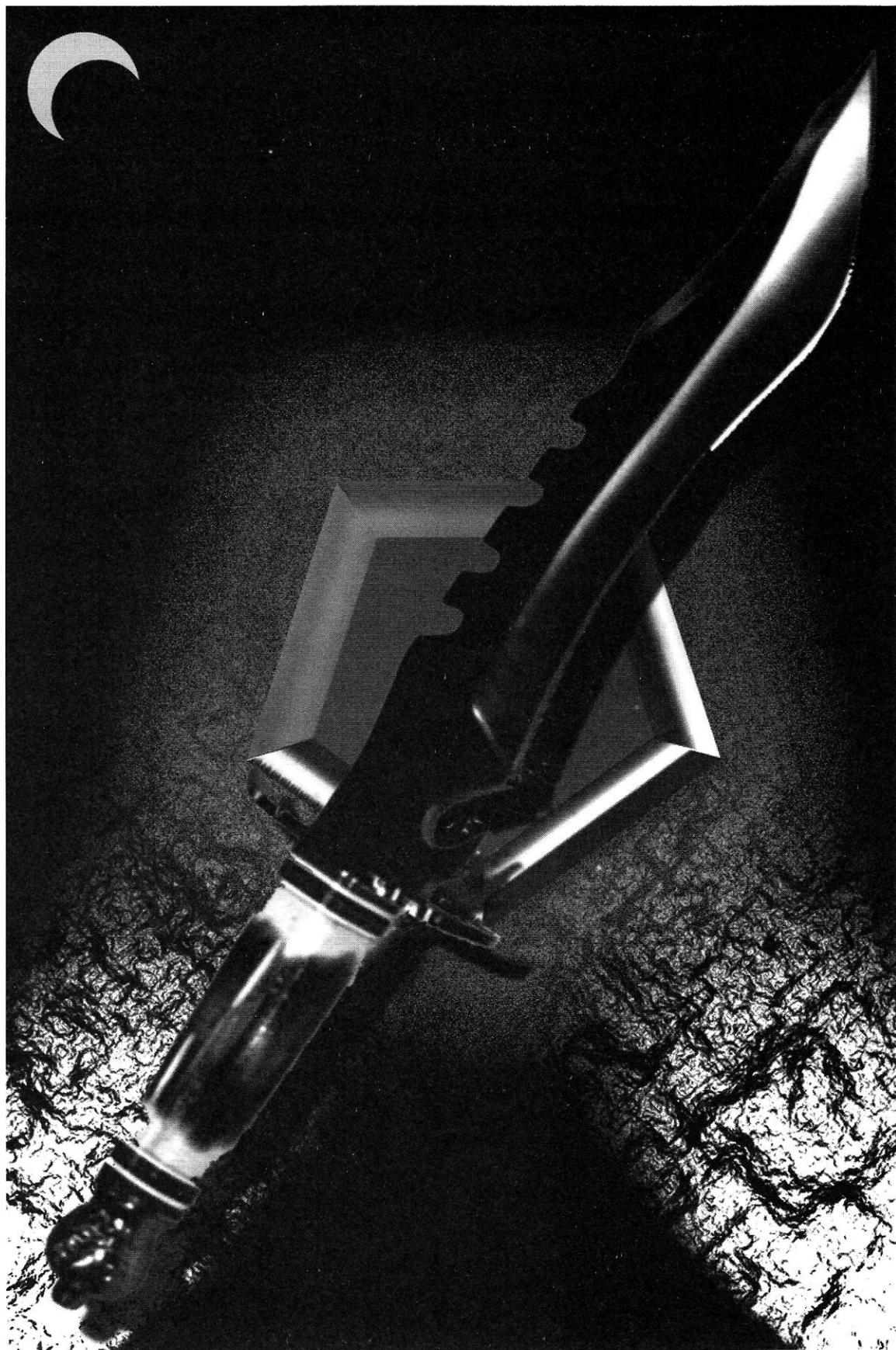
Through this suffering, the elven gods waited and watched for a champion to stand up for the elven people. Though there were many who tried to fight, none survived their encounters with Zalikar and so the elven gods waited in vain. In the years following the destruction of Falendaar, however, one among the refugees who escaped swore to protect her kin and to bring justice to the mon-



ster that destroyed their home. This one the elven gods called to become a paladin and to serve their just purposes. She was but fifty years of age when Falendaar was destroyed. When she grew old enough to choose her name, Melaphe Nightwhisper, she took up her calling as a paladin to the elven gods.

Melaphe began her quest early, leaving her family and their new home to pursue her quest of justice. From the family she left behind she had learned fencing and hunting. She traveled to human cities where she learned how to recognize and combat the trickery of evil. She visited the halls of dwarven lords where she learned the stalwart vigor and admirable courage of that noble race. She traveled through untamed wilderness where she learned the dangers of the wild world and marveled at the beauty of nature. In all these places she found signs of the passing of true evil, but she did not find Zalikar.

After many years of travel and hunting, Melaphe despaired of finding her quarry. The demon spawn seemed always some distant goal of which



she might catch fleeting glimpses. Yet never did she draw near to him; she never came near enough to strike. Melaphe made a pilgrimage to a distant temple of the chief of the elven gods. There she prayed for wisdom and guidance. She prayed for fate to bring her to Zalikar that she might enact the will of the gods and slay the monster. Fate heard her cry.

After a week's fasting and desperation, Melaphe made ready to leave the temple and continue her quest. She was stopped by word that a mighty beast with the face of an elf and the horns and wings of a demon had struck and laid waste to a village nearby. Elven scouts brought word that this demon was seen flying by moonlight in a path that would bring him to the very temple in which Melaphe rested. Uncertain and unconcerned what motive might drive Zalikar to her, Melaphe armed herself and bade the others hide within the temple. She told them to stay quiet and safe and await the end of the coming battle. For two days, she waited in silence and readied herself for the end of her quest or of her life.

When Zalikar came, he came suddenly in the night. Swooping down from the broad field of starlight, he landed at the very doors of the temple. Laughing with dire mirth at the devastation he intended to cause, the demon-elf opened the doors to the temple and found himself face to face with Melaphe Nightwhisper. A swift movement of blades brought Melaphe's rapier and dagger to Zalikar and drew his blood. Angered and but only lightly wounded, Zalikar struck back with demonic fury and the momentary advantage Melaphe had held was lost in a flurry of blows from her opponent.

Battered and losing ground, Melaphe fought on. Finally facing the one she sought for so long, she realized that she was to be undone. Her opponent was a master swordsman with many years more experience in battle than she. In the moment where she had hoped to find victory, she found only the possibility of defeat. Against all this, however, she refused to give way.

Melaphe would have lost that first battle but for the intervention of the elven gods and their priests. Seeing how the battle would end, the elven acolytes and clerics gathered together and began to use their magic against Zalikar. Though the demon spawn was powerful, the sheer number of divine magics began to weaken his resistance. Curses and spells of fear and doom struck him. Before he could slay Melaphe with his fiery blade, he withdrew for fear of losing his life.

Though Melaphe felt she had failed her quest and her god, the priests reminded her that through her actions and her courage, she had saved the temple. With the word of Zalikar's coming they were divided and frightened, and she had shown them how to withstand him and how to fight. Because of her, they had fought togeth-

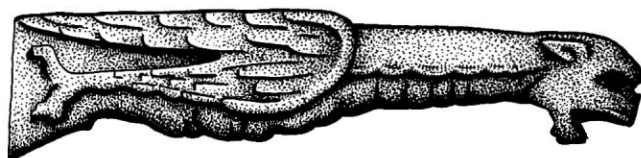
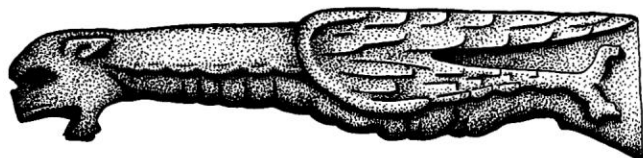
er and defeated—if not destroyed—Zalikar. They granted their blessings and asked that the elven gods show their benevolence to Melaphe. They all knew the time would come for a second battle between Melaphe and Zalikar, and the high priest hoped to make certain that the elven maid was victorious.

Zalikar withdrew from the battle angry with himself and the elves he fought. He was bitter for his defeat when he should have won. He hid himself away from the world and took out his frustrations on those lowly creatures that served him—weak goblins, corrupted men, and twisted elves. With the passing weeks, his thirst for revenge grew but it was held in check by his fear for his life. He had never come so close to defeat. The atrocity that mere mortal creatures might best him left him bitter. As months passed, and Zalikar convinced himself that his defeat was not so near as he had feared. In time, he no longer remembered the fear at all. He believed Melaphe and the elven priests were beneath his notice. Eventually, he ventured out again and continued his depredations among mortals.

Melaphe found that her quest had changed. No longer could she simply hunt and destroy the beast that had laid waste to her home. She knew now that she was not strong enough to conquer him alone. Instead, she sought the assistance of the gods more directly. Knowing that she was becoming the champion of her people against a sinister and potent evil, she hoped to find allies among the higher planes who would help her gather the strength she would need.

Melaphe disappeared from all record, much as Zalikar did. Many believe that she traveled to the home of the gods themselves. In the holy realms—or wherever her travels took her—the servants of the elven gods acknowledged Melaphe's quest. She found herself armed with a blessed blade. Demonhunter was its name, though it has also been known as Saelumtae ("Foe of Darkness"), Slayer of Evil, and Nightender. It was a holy dagger, used for the final destruction of those monsters too evil and resilient for weapons of mortal magic to combat. Whatever the truth of Melaphe's quest to the realms of the gods, it is certain she returned to the high priest bearing Demonhunter—said to have been made by the gods in ages past. Melaphe set out on her quest again. This time she was better armed for her coming battles.

For a few years Zalikar traveled across the land and listened for rumors of Melaphe's passing. Melaphe sought after the demon diligently, but he was skilled at hiding among mortal folk. He hid in centers of population where his penchant for evil went more easily unnoticed. When he struck, he attacked outlying settlements, caravans, or anyone unlucky enough to cross his path. Always he avoided the attention of those powerful enough to slay



him. He acted often enough, however, to give Melaphe a path to follow.

Melaphe followed this path to a traveler's inn in a small village. Having heard tales of murders in the surrounding lands, she knew Zalikar was close. When she found him, the power of Demonhunter saw through his magical disguise immediately. In the common room of the inn, he sat in a far corner watching those around him with restrained malevolence. Quelling her fears and readying herself to face the demon again, Melaphe challenged him to do battle. He recognized her immediately but felt no fear. His laugh echoed through the dimly lit room as he stood and drew his blade.

The battle began in earnest, but Melaphe was faster and fiercer than he had remembered. When Demonhunter struck home, the agony of the wound from the holy blade tore through Zalikar. It was only then that he remembered the fear he had felt the last time he faced Melaphe. Only when he felt the power of Demonhunter did he recognize his peril. He bellowed a roar that emptied the common room and fought even more fiercely than before. Now alone, Zalikar dropped his guise and fought in his true form.

Blade against blade they clashed. Zalikar tried to knock Demonhunter from his enemy's grasp, to smash the blade or wound Melaphe's arm. He tried all the tricks he had learned to remove Demonhunter from the battle—he knew the dagger could be his end. Melaphe held fast, however, and kept herself moving. She forced Zalikar to chase her, putting obstacles between them and preventing him from using the full force of his superior skill and fiery sword.

Within minutes, the inn was all but destroyed. Flames engulfed the building and Melaphe was forced to flee. On the street the battle resumed. In the open air, Zalikar's skill proved more than a match for Melaphe. She healed with magic—both her powers as a paladin and the magic of Demonhunter. Zalikar pressed his attack, and his wounds continued to bleed as he fought. The demon felt himself weakening.

Launching into the sky, Zalikar flew upward to free himself from battle. He knew he needed to heal his open wounds or they would claim his life, just as he knew Melaphe's wounds were also growing great. In the moment it took him to heal, Melaphe drank a potion and was also in the air. The battle continued in the sky, each combatant seeking a superior position or momentary

advantage.

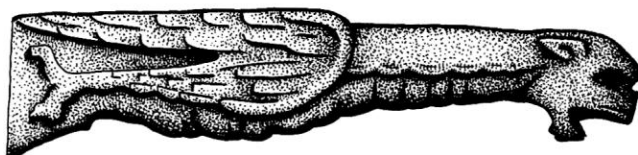
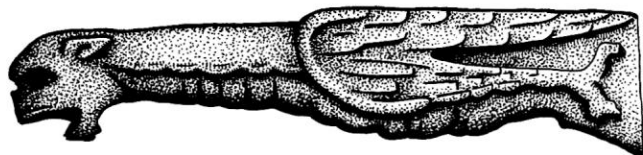
The people of the village came out to witness the combat. Some took up their bows to bring down the demon in their midst. As the arrows began to fly through the battle, Zalikar grew desperate and decided to take his opportunity. He knew that Melaphe's healing magics were near their end, and that both of them were weakened and near death. Concentrating his abyssal heritage, he cast his spell on Melaphe. She bellowed a scream of pain as the life fled from her body. Her skin dried, shriveled, and cracked. Falling from the sky, she died.

Zalikar hoped to take the dagger from her corpse and see it destroyed. The continuing attacks by townsfolk, however, were a threat to his life in his weakened condition. Fearing for his life again, Zalikar fled. He hated the townsfolk for his flight, as he felt they had forced him to show a weakness. The people on the ground gathered around the fallen hero and watched as the demon escaped into the skies.

Since Melaphe fell to her death there have been those among the elves—and the other races—who seek the holy blade Demonhunter. Most are paladins hoping to use the divine magic of the dagger to destroy other demons. Some wish to hunt Zalikar specifically. Rumors persist that there are others, acting as agents of abyssal or infernal forces, who seek the dagger called Demonhunter in order to destroy it.

Tales among the elves, particularly those refugees from Falendaar, contend that Melaphe will return to carry on her quest. Some believe she has already returned and even now hunts her quarry in secret, wielding Demonhunter as before. Of the villagers that witnessed Melaphe's fall, none remain. Only those townsfolk might know for certain if the elven paladin rose again to continue her hunt. None of them, however, seem to have survived the brutal attack on their town not long after the battle. All were murdered in a single night and their blood left to stain the ground.

It is certain that Zalikar escaped that final battle. It is equally certain that his depredations continue to destroy the innocent wherever he encounters them. He laid waste to the town where he killed Melaphe. Whether he found her body or the signs of her return there, only Zalikar knows. He did not find Demonhunter—he still searches for the holy dagger. He kills those who stand in his way and dreams of the day when he can destroy the divine blade that almost cost him his life.



Souleye, the sword of Dalan the Younger

Dalan the Younger is the greatest ruler that has ever served the ages-old Presstin Kingdom. He inherited the throne from his learned father, Dalan the Elder, some hundred years ago, giving it up to his grandson only a few years ago before secluding himself in shadow and secret.

Dalan the Younger was born to an elven mother and human father in the wake of Dalan the Elder's punishing victory over the Dwarves of Thorgund. He was the first-born son of the king, and as such tradition demanded that he begin training as a warrior at the earliest possible age.

But Dalan the Elder was not one for tradition. Indeed, he had already broken down most of the archaic power structure of his predecessors. He did not allow himself or his family to be bound by simple tradition. Though his son was undoubtedly destined to lead his realm, Dalan the Elder was adamant that the child be allowed to find his own way.

Of course, that does not mean that he did not try to steer his son's education and training. Dalan the Elder was not only a powerful magic user; he was also a historian and a scientist. He would spend hours each day reading to his son and discussing topics in all fields of study. He would even allow his son, still a boy, to observe state business.

When it came to battle, Dalan the Elder left the instruction to his house's many armorers and the most trustworthy and skilled of his royal guards. He had never been a gifted fighter himself, so he provided his son access to those who were. He did supervise the child's explorations of the magical arts, however.

By the time Dalan the Younger reached puberty, he was capable of holding his own in debates with every one of his father's ministers. He was bright, inquisitive and headstrong, not unlike his father at the same age. Yet, he was not exactly like his father before him. He had an obvious talent for sorcery and magic, but that was not his true passion. He had a natural and easy rapport with everyone he met, a talent matched only by his skill with the blade. From the first time he picked up a sword, he spent hours practicing his blade work daily, tirelessly practicing thrusts and parries, often while deeply embroiled in a philosophical debate with his father or one of his instructors.

Of course, Dalan the Elder knew that there was only so much the boy could learn at home, even if that home was the royal palace. Long before his son reached his majority, the king recognized that Dalan the Younger was quickly

approaching that plateau. If he were to ever reach his own personal best, the young prince would need to travel beyond the castle and see the world just like his father did at the same age.

Dalan the Younger would, of course, have to travel in disguise; were anyone to recognize him, he would be in immediate danger. Yet his father could not send enough soldiers along to protect him from everything, and a large, well-armed party would only attract unwanted attention. The young Dalan would have to rely almost exclusively on his own significant skills to protect him. King Dalan the Elder gave his son one final gift: a sword crafted by the royal swordsmith, the same man who had forged Soulsong so many years earlier.

This was no normal sword, however. Where Soulsong was meant for a man who was far more wizard than warrior, this blade was the opposite. A virtual duplicate of his father's royal blade, the younger Dalan's sword was a two-handeded Kris. It was also longer and heavier than his father's, designed to deliver incredible blows and inflict more terrible wounds. More than that, it would be Dalan the Younger's royal coronation blade when he finally took the throne.

Dalan the Elder had been preparing the blade for years. He wanted to gift his son with something truly magnificent, both beautiful and powerful. Dalan took his time with this blade, carefully enchanting it over the course of several years.

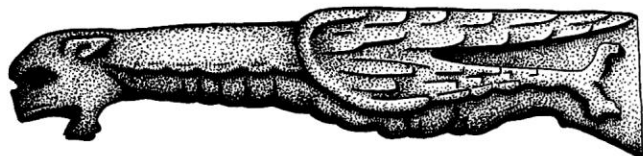
Dalan the Elder gave his son the sword the evening before he left. He told the younger Dalan nothing of the sword's capabilities - he wanted his son to rely on his own skills, not the magical abilities of some mere object - only that if he needed help, all he should do is ask the sword.

With no fanfare and no good-byes, Dalan the Younger, dressed in the clothes of a commoner, left the palace through sparsely traveled streets and even the sewers carrying nothing but the clothes on his back, his sword and a few coins.

Like his father before him, Dalan the Younger quickly became enthralled in all that the world could teach him. Though he was emotionally close to his mother, father and his six siblings, he soon lost track of how long he had been gone.

Dalan quickly adjusted to his new life, however difficult it was. After wandering the lands for a while, he came upon a monastery deep in the Gostal Mountains. He spent the next five years there, learning nothing but how to meditate and discover inner peace. During that time he didn't fight or hunt. He didn't even talk with the servants or other visitors. His time there was only about discovering peace.

Yet during that time he discovered something. He was

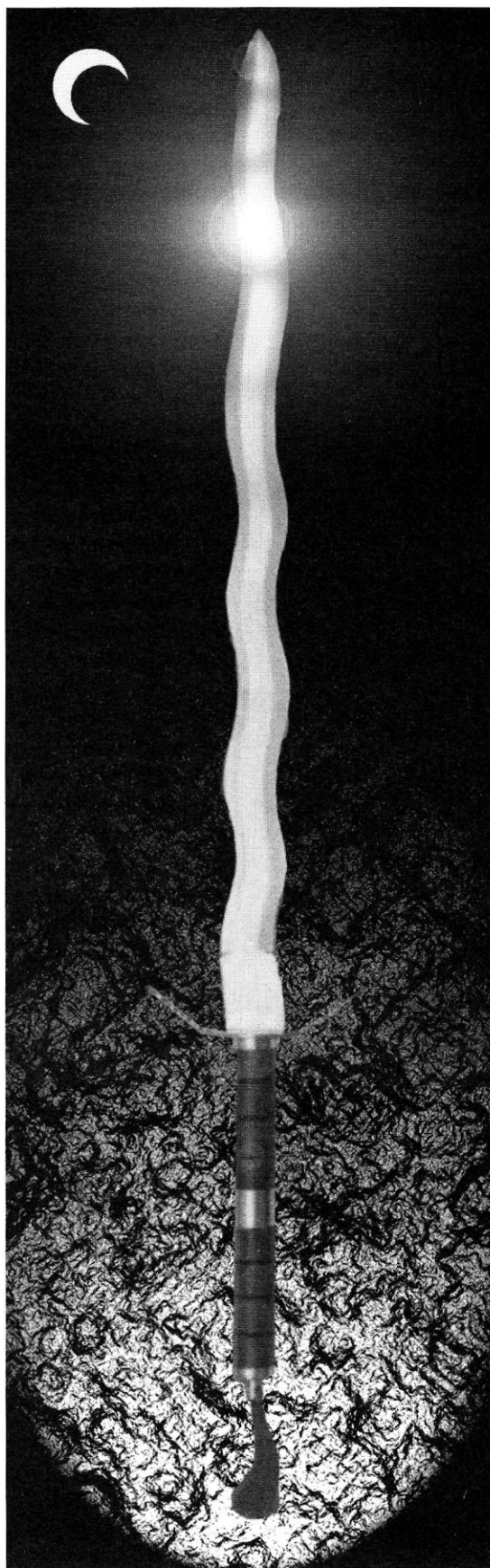


not sure what it was at first, but he slowly came to recognize what it was. His sword would talk to him, quietly whispering to him in those moments of absolute peace. It didn't tell him what to do or what to think. It didn't even seem to be speaking a language. Yet Dalan recognized the tone of the words, their inflection. His father was speaking to him through the sword, reassuring him while on his journeys abroad.

During his time within the monastery Dalan learned more than just meditation, however. The monastery housed an incredible library of centuries-old historical, scientific and religious tomes. He veritably consumed the library, committing many to memory and even illuminating specific passages and sections within his own growing set of personal journals.

Just when he was ready to move on, disaster befell the monastery. A band of thugs burst into the mountain retreat and subdued the silent monks in short order. Their leader, a drow named Kin'Dreel, was a woman consumed with rage and distrust. She led her ragged group of fugitives into the mountains in hopes of finding a refuge for the coming winter.

Thinking the group of pacifistic monks easy prey, they herded them all into a central chamber and searched each room one by one, looking for valuables that they could plunder. The only room they found anything of interest in was



Dalan's. His was the only one adorned with anything they perceived as valuable, in this case his sword and his journals.

Kin'Dreel took an interest in what they found. Dalan's room was the only one with any personal effects. She looked over his journals, but they made no sense to her – he had written them in his own code, a combination of different languages and magical scripts. Kin'Dreel was herself an intelligent and learned individual, but the thought that he knew more of arcane lore than her infuriated her. Moreover, the simple fact that he possessed such an exquisite weapon only intensified the hatred she felt toward him.

Kin'Dreel burst into the chamber holding the monks and demanded to know who owned the sword and the journals. Though every monk knew that they belonged to Dalan, no one identified him; they only stood in habitual, stoney silence. Only when she threatened to begin executing the monks one by one did Dalan step forward. He knelt before the drow as a sign of supplication, but he did not speak. He would not break that place's vow of silence.

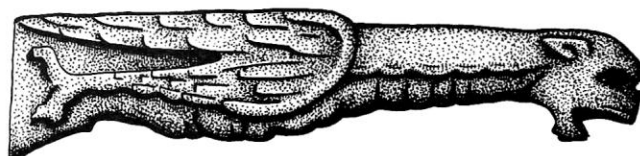
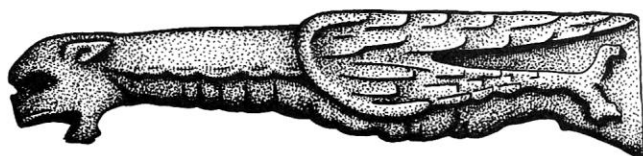
She asked him question after question.

"Who are you?"

"Why do you have that sword?"

"What language are these books written in?"

"Who created the



weapon?"

"Why are you here?"

Yet he did not answer. He only stared up into her eyes, reading her.

Dalan's demeanor and refusal to answer only infuriated her more. She held his sword in her right hand, and as her anger grew, she began to sweat and tremble more and more. She was about ready to tell her wicked henchmen to kill every monk in the room when Dalan leapt into action.

Though the monks had a strict code of silence that did not mean that they could not communicate with each other. Over the centuries of their existence, the monks developed a subtle yet detailed silent language. As a part of mastering inner peace, they gained nearly full control of their bodily functions. They could alter their breathing, their heart rate and even their blushing. By subtly shifting these rhythms and making nearly imperceptible muscle movements, the monks could speak volumes that no one else could hear.

While Kin'Dreel exploded on her tirade, Dalan prepared the monks for the fight to come. The monastic order also shunned violence, but if the innocent monks were to survive, he would have to act. He would not harm any of Kin'Dreel's dutiful thugs if he could help it, however.

All the while, he experienced something else new. He heard his sword whispering in his ear, only this time he could understand it. Moreover, it seemed to be telling him Kin'Dreel's deepest thoughts, her moods and her deep, deep anger. He knew what she was thinking almost before she did.

When he heard her order to kill in his head, Dalan made his move. He unleashed his first surprise on the unsuspecting thugs when he cast a spell that brought darkness down upon the entire chamber. Using only his heightened sense of hearing to guide him, he subdued each and every one of Kin'Dreel's men, using a combination of magical spells and deadly martial arts, all without uttering a sound – during his time in the monastery, he also perfected his use of spellcasting without the need to speak.

With most of his would-be attackers disabled, Dalan lifted the darkness, much to Kin'Dreel's dismay. Seeing the entire room cleared of monks and every one of her men neutralized, she flew into an attack of rage. But Dalan was prepared for her, keeping himself calm in the face of her wrath. He dodged her every wild swing, ducking and parrying but never himself attacking. The fight, if it could be called that, lasted for twenty minutes when Kin'Dreel collapsed in a combination of exhaustion and despair.

Dalan kept her entire band prisoner within the

monastery throughout the winter – none of them would have survived a trek through the mountains and all the monks agreed that they would try to rehabilitate some of these misdirected men and women. Many simply went crazy after months of magically imposed silence within the monastery, but some did slowly turn around to live more productive lives.

When the first spring melt came upon the mountain passes, Dalan left the monastery behind, taking with him the thugs that would not stay behind. He kept his prisoners silent, but when several tried to escape, he struck them down before they got out of sight – he was no longer compelled to follow the monks' strict codes, after all. None of the thugs defied the young prince again. Dalan led them out of the mountains and into the nearest town they had plagued. He was pleasantly surprised to find that they all had bounties on their heads. With a sack full of gold coins, Dalan continued his journeys as his father had wished, turning toward bounty hunting to support himself.

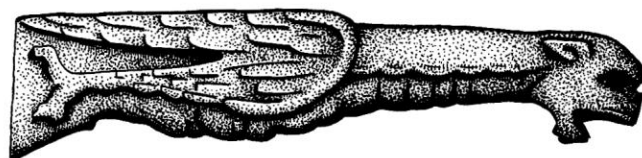
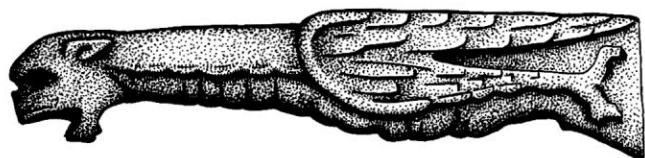
He spent the next two decades of his life doing just that. The time passed quickly for the half-elf prince, but he learned much about the world and himself. More often than not, he accepted the gift of books and ancient objects as payment, adding to his rapidly growing library, which he kept secreted away, split between a number of secret caches.

Dalan also learned much about his sword during this time. Not long after leaving the monastery he found that he could actually contact his father through the weapon, which he soon did on a regular basis. But it wasn't only his father that he could contact – soon Dalan discovered that he could mentally speak to just about anyone he concentrated on. Then, one day, he actually saw the person he was talking to. With further mastery, the sword's incredible magic allowed him to see just about anything he needed.

Dalan the Younger soon became the best and most sought-after bounty hunter, but also the most reclusive. No one could find him; he would seek out those who wanted to hire him, and would accept only the most difficult assignments. When such opportunities did not present themselves, he spent his time in a second guise, studying and learning.

His most difficult bounty came nineteen years after he left the monastery. A warlord had been terrorizing the western reaches of his father's ever-expanding Presstin Kingdom, as well as other local fiefdoms. Innocents had been killed, women ravaged and homesteads razed. The young half-elf's blood boiled at the prospect of it. The warlord had to be stopped.

Try as he did, Dalan could not locate the warlord or his base camp, not even with the help of his sword. For two



years he fought off thugs and other bounty hunters seemingly tracking him, yet never catching the scent of the warlord. They waited for him at every turn. When he returned to his caches, the warlord's men were there. High in the mountains or deep in the forests, he always felt their presence. Yet when he found them, they never knew who sent them or even how they knew where he was. They just knew to track him with some keen, animalistic sense.

Dalan quickly came to the only logical conclusion – that he was tracking a powerful wizard, perhaps one more powerful than he. Calling upon every bit of his magical prowess, he cast block after block over himself, yet they still seemed to find him. He went so far as to contact the most powerful spellcasters he knew of – including his father – but none could provide him a more powerful spell that might shield him from the potent scrying that surely watched his every move.

Then he realized something significant. The men tracking him knew who he was as well as where he was, a fact impossible unless someone had managed to tap into the power of his sword. So he hid it away on a different plane, opening a gate using a variation on demonic summoning spells he learned.

After he did so, the path suddenly cleared for Dalan. The prey became the hunter. More and more men came searching for Dalan, but to no avail.

That worked to Dalan's favor, however. Though the warlord's best warriors hid their tracks carefully, the warlord could not shield all of their minds. Dalan soon learned the location of the warlord's base of operations. Before charging in, though, he summoned his sword back to him.

What he found simply shocked him. The warlord was a powerful magic user, yes, but he was also something more. He was Dalan's brother, the eighth of Dalan the Elder's children. Born after Dalan had already left the palace, Haddol had pursued magical knowledge more than Dalan, but felt he had grown up in the shadow of a father and a brother who was more than he would ever be. Jealously eventually grew into hatred and sociopathy. He had left on his own quest at a far younger age than any of his siblings had, only increasing his resentment toward his own family, especially the two hated Dalans. He had schemed many years to force this final confrontation with Dalan, only Dalan had artfully managed to force the confrontation on his own terms, increasing Haddol's frustration.

The two brothers battled for what seemed like days. The sword actually protected Dalan from most of his brother's magical attacks, yet at the same time Dalan found that he could not strike his brother with the weapon or even cause harm to him while it was in his

hand. Dalan also knew that he could not simply exhaust his brother to win the battle like he had with so many other of his prey.

Again, the sword held the key to defeating his opponent. Dalan looked deep into Haddol's heart and, using a mix of the magical and common skills he had learned during the course of his travels, he slowly tugged at the strings holding his brother's sanity together. Dalan spoke one thing, but his body language said another while he used the sword's abilities to direct something completely different into his brother's mind.

In the end, Dalan did not kill his brother, but he did pull his mind apart. The cost to his own sanity was terrible, though. The sword made him feel everything he did to his brother.

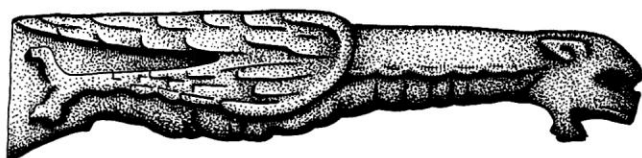
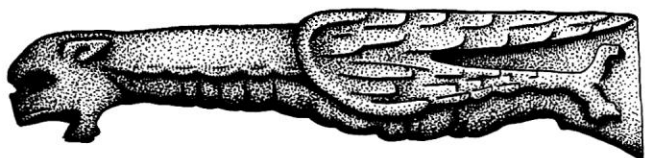
The guilt and pain nearly overcame him. He could not turn his brother over to those who were looking for him – they would kill him in a heartbeat. Yet he could not return home just yet, either. He did the only thing he could. He brought his brother to the monastery, where the grateful and wise monks welcomed him with open arms. The two remained there for years more while Dalan delved deep into his brother's mind with the sword and reconstructed Haddol.

When Dalan had done all he could, the two returned to Presstin with no fanfare, no celebration. Haddol was no longer a threat, yet he was no longer himself. Dalan had destroyed his brother and, no matter what anyone said to him, he would never forget what he did and could never forgive himself.

But Dalan the Younger was home, finally. He accepted the command of the Presstin armies from his father, but he was no longer quite the same man. When not drilling with his men or leading them into battle, he spent time with his brother, attempting to "fix" him, or his father, listening to the wisdom of the elder Dalan and his own sword.

Even after Dalan the Younger took the helm of leadership from his father, he would sometimes spend days at a time beside the elder Dalan's place within the royal crypt, listening to the two swords speak their advice, always hoping for a way to heal his brother yet never finding one.

Dalan the Younger ruled for nearly a century, as perhaps the best king that the Presstins had ever had. Even without his sword to help him, he could look deep within a person and tell what made him tick. He was the wisest and most even-tempered king, yet also the most skillful of warriors. He retired while still within his prime, however. He still lives today, sequestered somewhere with Haddol. Rumor has it he has been traveling the planes of power, searching for a way – any way – to finally cure his brother.



Goblinslayer, the sword of Americ the Tall

Dwarves love to argue; it's a matter of record through history. No two enjoy a lengthy debate more than Khumdred son of Hafstred and his cousin Glowen son of Owen, both veteran warriors of the earthen halls of Gurud-thum. Why, to hear them say it, it's not really an argument if your beard doesn't grow by an inch or two for the time it takes. Guard duty in the hilly wilderness gives a pair of cantankerous dwarves plenty of time to argue.

"You've got rocks for brains, Khumdred, I tell you," Glowen chided.

"Rocks for brains, do I?"

"Aye, rocks for brains." The son of Owen straightened his mail shirt and leaned back against a mighty oak's trunk. "It explains plenty, it do."

"And what brings you to this conclusion?" Khumdred finished untangling the end of his red beard and poked a stick into the fire, sending sparks up toward the moon and stars.

"Well, plenty of things, now that I think on it."

"Anything in particular?"

"Aye, there is a matter that's been weighing on my mind for some time, Khumdred."

"Indeed? And what might that be?" The son of Hafstred leaned forward on his up-ended axe and let the warmth of the fire compete with the chill breeze on his knobby nose.

"Why, you must remember, you great oaf!"

"I swear I don't. Please tell me."

"You mean to tell me that you don't remember, not a fortnight ago, standing guard together on this very spot, mind you, telling me that you thought we could have won the Fourth Goblin War without the aid of Americ the Tall?"

"Ah, so that's what you're on about."

"Of course that's what I'm on about, you clod. 'Tis the most daft thing I've heard you mumble in many a year. It's been bouncing around in my head ever since and there's just one conclusion to be had, I tell you. Rocks ... for ... brains!"

"It's a shame you've been so worried it about it, Glowen, what with your little brain so challenged as it is. Why, I'm surprised there's been room up there for such a thing what with all your worrying about getting fat and slow and such."

"I'd take your fat head off at the shoulders without breaking a sweat, that's for sure."

"In your dreams, Glowen."

"Be that as it may, you've got no business spouting on about historical matters that you don't understand."

"I understand them plenty well, I do, and I stand by what I said before. Americ the Tall did not save our precious earthen halls from the goblin hordes all by himself. He had plenty of help from us, and I think we could have driven them back without his help at all!" With that he lifted his heavy axe up and thumped it back on the ground resolutely.

"Ah, so now you're a history professor, are you? Got your studies in between wenches and kegs, did you?"

"You don't need to be a history professor to know the story of the Fourth Goblin War, you nincompoop."

"Nincompoop?" Glowen straightened his belt and threw his shoulders back.

"Nincompoop! Every one of us heard the telling of the Goblin Wars a hundred times before we got the first fuzz on our chins, and if you'd been paying attention you'd know that Americ the Tall's contribution, while important, was highly overrated."

"Overrated? Are you drunk?"

"Overrated! And I don't get drunk on just a half barrel of ale and you know it! I don't care if Americ was swinging Goblinslayer all the while. There's nothing that an overgrown human with a magic sword can do that a few stout dwarves with axes can't do better!"

"Ack, you've completely missed the point of it!"

Glowen shook his head until his helmet nearly fell off.

"No I haven't!"

"Yes you have, you half-wit! There were no dwarves left in the halls when Americ arrived."

"There were plenty of dwarves left. How could a few tribes of stinking goblins 'empty all the halls?'"

"I don't know, but that's how the story goes, you oaf!"

"It must be *metal freek all*."

"Metal freek all?"

"You know. Metal freek all."

"You mean metaphorical?"

"Yeah, that's it. Metaphorical."

"What could possibly be metaphorical about 'not a dwarf was left standing in the great earthen halls?'"

"Well, there must have been some left here and there. The halls are mighty big, you know."

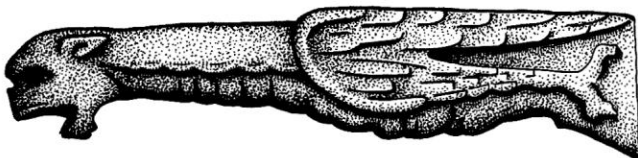
"Look here, my dim friend, maybe I should catch you up a bit on the legend of the Fourth Goblin War and Americ the Tall."

"Oh, you should catch me up, should you?"

"Apparently!" Glowen pinched his temples between thumb and finger. "'Metal freek all' indeed!" he muttered beneath his breath.

"Well, then get on with it. 'Catch me up' my rotund, learned comrade!"

"Okay, you remember the bit that starts 'seasons of



peace' and 'bloodless hewing of stone?'"

"Yeah, I remembers it."

"That sets the whole thing up, you see. There was a long time of peace between the Third Goblin War and the Fourth, that's all it's saying. Then the story goes on with the whole 'sharpening of knives' and 'tribes banding together' stuff."

"Yeah, I knows it as well as you, Glowen!"

"Well that part talks about how all the goblin tribes banded together, which they generally don't do no more. I reckon they didn't do it much back then, either, or they wouldn't make such a big deal about it in the story, if you catch my meaning."

"So the goblin tribes all came together. What's the big deal?"

"Do you know how many goblins are in a tribe, Khumdred?"

"Well, no. I ain't counted a whole tribe of them before."

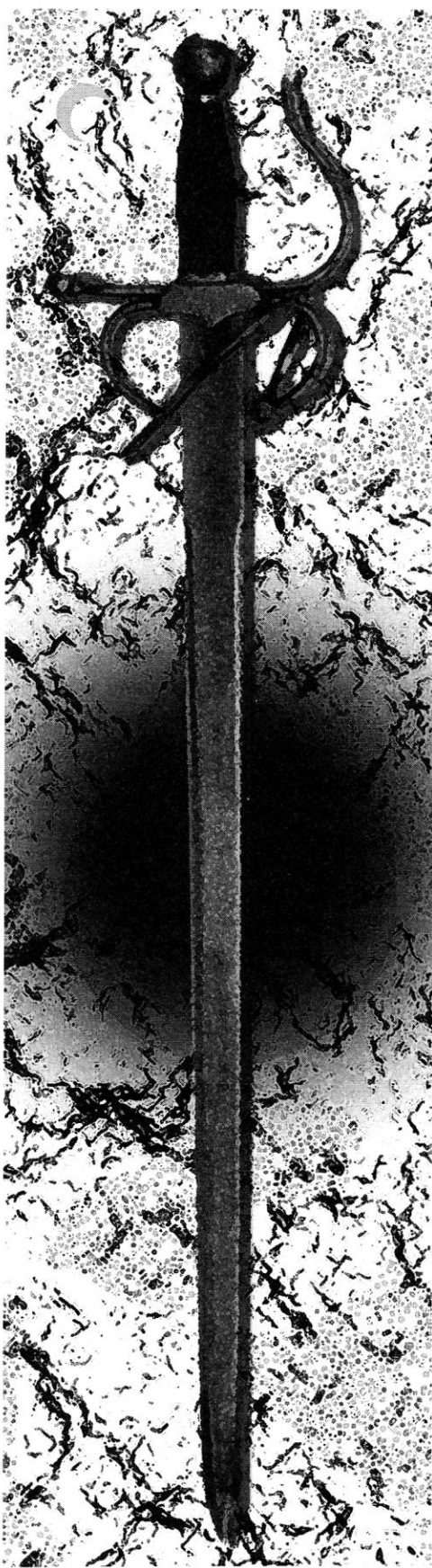
"Well, there's plenty, let me assure you. They breed like rabbits, the green-skinned bastards. Their mothers have litters of ten or twelve as I understand it, and the babes are full grown in a matter of weeks! You can wipe out all but a few of 'em and they'll be back full strength before the seasons come round again!" Glowen snapped his fingers to help make his point.

"All that may be true, but I don't know what it's got to do with Americ the Tall." The son of Hafstred let out an exaggerated yawn and snapped his dry lips together.

"It's got everything to do with it! Every goblin tribe was back to full strength and they all came together to attack us again. That's tens of thousands of goblins, all working together!"

"They don't work together too well normally, it's true."

"Yes, you know. That's why



they're so easy to kill."

"Yeah. A dozen might attack, but half of 'em run off with the first trinket they can plunder, then some of the others start fighting each other. That's why they're no match for a regiment of trained dwarves!" Khumdred gripped the haft of his axe a bit tighter.

"Exactly! See, you're not so dumb when you pay attention."

"Who's the dumb one? You've just agreed with my point that we dwarves could have done the job without Americ and his glowing sword."

"Agreed with your point, did I?"

"Yeah!"

"I did no such thing!"

"You most certainly did!"

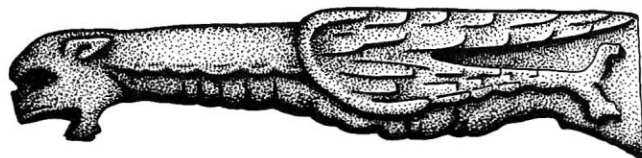
"You're daft, Khumdred! I'm trying to explain that the legend says quite clearly that there were no dwarves left after all the goblin tribes attacked to drive them back out. We were scattered out into the wilderness. By the beards of the gods, the story goes on for hours on that point. 'Wandering 'neath the bright sun' and 'far from the beloved mountains' and such like that. Them that weren't enslaved, that is. Did you sleep through those parts?"

"Not always, no."

"Well, keep with me, my ignorant chum, and learn something more, 'cause I always stayed awake through the whole story. The goblins all got together, see, and they attacked the halls and scattered or enslaved every dwarf. Then this Flegnost the Wicked fellow makes his own throne of dwarven bones and sits on it for a hundred years or more!"

"Flegnost, rot his miserable green skin!"

"Ah, so you must have been paying some attention to the story after all. Yes, Flegnost, the smart goblin that got them all to fight together in the first place. Took the whole place



over, he did, and set to wrecking it just the way he liked it."

"Broke a lot of great stuff, he did!"

"Yeah, smashed a lot of stuff and burnt up the rest. Bloody bastard! By the time he was done the whole place was just a big goblin stink hole, not fit for an elf!"

"Goblin wagon coming," Khumdred said, calmly.

"Yeah, I see it down there," Glowen strained his neck to look down the slope to the road below, bathed in cool moonlight. The wagon's poorly greased axles whined as it labored along the rutted track, and a dozen dark figures skulked along nearby.

"Must be wanting to plunder the outer villages again." The Son of Hafstred picked up his axe and adjusted the shield on his back.

"Yeah, they never learn," Glowen agreed, getting to his feet and straightening his mail armor. The pair kicked out their small fire and plodded determinedly to their usual positions near a few tons of stone held in place by a wooden pen.

"Anyway, where was I?" Glowen continued, "Oh yeah, Flegnost was a particularly nasty critter who sent agents out to keep the dwarves from getting back together. Most were goblins, but he paid a bunch of elves and other scum to do the same. You know, ambushes and burning houses, that sort of stuff. Paid for with our fine gold and gems, too, plundered from our very halls!" Glowen spat on the ground.

"Filthy bugger!" Khumdred grabbed a wooden lever and the pile of stones shifted a bit. "Now?"

"No, let them come a bit further." Glowen assessed the progress of the goblin wagon below them matter-of-factly. "So, anyway, all these ruffians take the goblin gold and harry our great-great-grandsires. All but one, that is. Americ the Tall."

"Now?" Khumdred asked.

"Uh ... now!" With that the dwarves released the wooden pen and the tons of stones tumbled loudly down the slope. Goblins shrieked and dodged out of the way, but enough hurtling stone slammed into the wagon to crack its wheels, tip it and roll it down off the road. The pair observed the destruction.

"Rounder stones next time, I should think?" Khumdred said.

"Yeah, the flatter ones don't go as far," Glowen agreed, pointing to a couple that stopped halfway down. "Well, shall we?"

"Yes." The dwarves hoisted their weapons and calmly descended into the ruin of their manufactured avalanche. "Now, what was your point about Americ the Tall?"

"Oh, yes. Well, he would never take dwarven gold from goblins and their lot, seeing as how his father befriended some dwarves when he was a younger man."

"A perceptive fellow, Americ's father."

"Indeed. So Americ grew up hearing all about our kind and he loved everything about us. He hated goblins as much as we do, or so the stories say."

The pair approached the remains of the smashed goblin wagon, now tipped on its side with its contents strewn down the hillside; the usual: empty sacks for loot and chains and cages for captives. Its driver was nothing more than goo beneath a couple of large avalanche stones.

"Arrow," Glowen warned, calmly, and Khumdred raised his shield to intercept a black-fletched missile.

"Thanks. Three coming from below, I think, and the rest from above." With that the first slaving goblins gathered their meager courage and leapt out from their bushy hiding places, cruel black knives at the ready.

"Right. So, as I was saying, Americ knew dwarves well," Glowen said while cleaving a goblin completely in twain with a broad sweep of his axe. "He actually slaughtered a number of these goblin agents and liberated their loot from them."

"Really," Khumdred answered as two goblins advanced slowly upon him. "I never heard that part."

"It's not part of the regular story, it ain't. I heard that part from a shopkeeper down in the burrows. Great storyteller, he is, and what a lovely wife. Made the sweetest ale-cakes I ever had." His axe fell easily through the skull of a second goblin.

"Oh, that sounds good about now, don't it!" The Son of Hafstred prided himself on a tricky overhand double swing maneuver that he invented, and used it just then to behead the pair of green-skinned goblins to either side. "You don't have any ale-cakes with you, do you?"

"Afraid not."

"Pity." The pair cleaned the gore from their axe blades against the dusty ground, having dispatched the first wave of marauding monsters. "Got a taste for an ale-cake just now."

"Anyway, Americ took this gold, silver, and a couple of really fine goblets with sapphires and rubies and went to a wizard he knew of ..."

"Oh, I hates wizards," Khumdred hissed between clenched teeth.

"Any right-thinking dwarf does, stout fellow, but this Americ, being a human, didn't mind them much. He traded all the loot he stole back from these goblin agents to get the wizard to cast magic on his family sword."

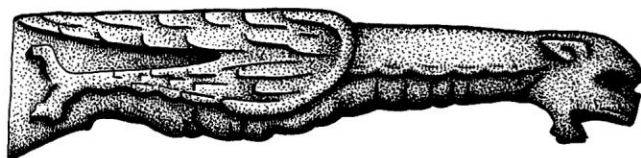
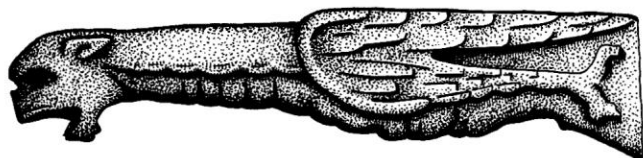
"Goblinslayer!"

"Yes, but it wasn't called that yet. It was just a sword." Glowen peered into the surrounding darkness and sniffed. "Some more coming from below. Seven, maybe."

"Eight or more, I'll bet you."

"Full keg of ale?"

"Full keg."



"Done." The pair paced off enough ground between them to freely swing their axes, spat on their hands, and held their weapons at the ready. "So he asked the wizard to make the sword really grand against goblins, since it was in Americ's mind to kill quite a few of 'em."

"Aye, and he did."

"Yes, he did. Behind, you, Khumdred."

"Yeah, I see 'em." A pair of goblins jumped up from behind a rotting log, let fly a couple of arrows that went wildly off target, and then charged with knives held overhead. A few more darted around the remains of the wagon in an attempt to surround the dwarves.

"Americ got his sword back from the wizard and went straight for the earthen halls. He hacked every goblin bastard he met to pieces, and before long lots of wandering dwarves heard about him. They went to rally behind him, grabbing up their own hammers and axes. By the time he got to the earthen halls, crammed full of putred goblins, he had a good regiment of 400 dwarves behind him." Glowen swung left, then right, hacking the arm off one shrieking goblin and a foot off another.

"Right! And them dwarves probably did most of the goblin killing, that's my point!" Khumdred's axe bit into goblin flesh again and again, but a sneaky, little one darted in toward his feet and cut him along the thigh, rending a tear in his chain armor. "Damn!"

"Serious?" his comrade asked casually, using the butt of his axe haft to crush in a goblin's jaw.

"No, but this mail will need care."

"Swing lower next time and get the short ones at the same time."

"Good idea!"

"You might be right about Americ's goblin killing if it weren't for that big one, Flegnost. The story says he personally wiped out two dozen fine dwarven warriors and not a single axe sliced his hide. Some kind of evil goblin shaman magic, or so it's told. Why, if that's true he would have done in all the dwarves himself if it weren't for Americ the Tall!" He shouted the hero's name and smashed the rib cage of the last goblin that stood against him at the same time. "That felt good," he exclaimed. "You try it."

"All right. For Americ the Tall!" Two cowardly goblins gave ground at Khumdred's shout, and he swung through both their necks easily with a single blow.

"Felt good, aye?"

"Aye, felt good!"

"One, two, three, plus them three there ... I count only six bodies, Son of Hafstred. That keg's going to go down nicely!"

"Not so fast," Khumdred craned his neck to listen. "The last of 'em's still lurking in them bushes down there," he said, pointing.

"Well, they don't count toward the total if they run off."

"So, I'm not going to let 'em run off then, am I!"

Khumdred bounded down into the bushes and three goblins screamed and ran in three directions.

"No fair, you cheater!"

"You'll pay up if I get just two more!"

"All right, all right. But you'll have to do it yourself. I'll just sit here while you go chasing through the bushes like a silly elf or something." Glowen leaned his axe against a tree and flopped onto the ground to catch his breath.

"You won't find a son of Owen's carrying on so!"

"Just loosen your purse and get ready to buy my keg, you lazy bugger. Entertain me while I hunt these down."

"Fair enough, then. So it took Americ the Tall to face down this magical goblin Flegnost. The story goes on for an hour or more about their battle, up one end of the despoiled caverns and down the other. Every time the goblin king's knife met Goblinslayer there was a shower of sparks that lit down on everything of goblin make and set it ablaze. Now, goblins don't make much, mind you, just junk like bedding and benches and such - piss-poor workmanship, all of it - but it all went up in flames. Smoke everywhere, Americ fighting Flegnost, dwarves slaughtering goblins everywhere. Can you imagine the mess!"

Khumdred crept up slowly on a trembling bush and kicked its occupant so hard it rolled out into the open. His axe hacked it in two before it could right itself. "That's one."

"Eventually these sparks started even landing on the goblins, too, lighting up their belts and straps and wooden shields and such. Goblinslayer hated goblins, nearly as much as Americ, and he nearly as much as a dwarf. Americ pressed the battle to Flegnost and eventually put the magic sword's point right at his throat. Humans are dramatic that way. If it had been me, well, I'd have just killed the bugger and been done with it. But Americ made him give an order to all the remaining goblins to leave the earthen halls and never return."

"Stupid human," Khumdred called over his shoulder, chasing down a second goblin and relieving him of his head.

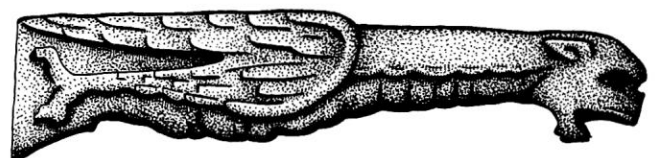
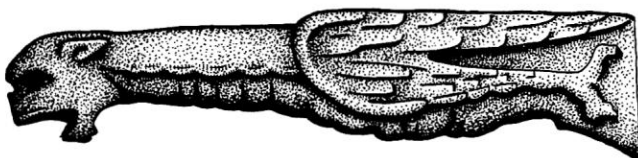
"Yeah, stupid human. Goblins don't keep oaths. But to spare their own miserable lives for the moment they all did what they were told and skedaddled."

"And then he killed him."

"And then he killed him. Sword's still in the Americ family, somewhere. Too long for a dwarf to swing, so it's pretty much worthless, if you ask me."

Khumdred returned and plopped two severed goblin heads beside Glowen. "Two more. That makes eight and you owe me a keg."

"Good enough. But I'll be drinking most of it!"



Blood-Dew Sword

In the third summer of Nolder's reign, civil war gripped every province of the realm. Loyalists beneath the young king's tattered banner once welcomed in every village by cheering townsfolk waving flags and tossing flowers, now found doors barred and windows shuttered tight. Who could blame them, Nolder thought? Were his soldiers now any less guilty of savagery than his enemies? Looking among his ranks he now saw fewer and fewer familiar faces, more and more hawk-faced mercenaries from distant lands with uncertain motives. Was he right to defend his claim to the throne so vigorously, so selfishly?

It was his own cousin Durn of Longmeadow who first challenged the birthright so long ago. "If good king Alor, rest his soul, wished Nolder to succeed him, why did he appoint me to watch over the realm during his long illness? Where was young Nolder then?" The words still rang in the prince's ears, hurtful and more than a little true. He was just nineteen when his father the king became ill, and he only heard via messenger from the capital to the mountain retreat where he was studying history and philosophy among the monks. There was no sense of urgency then, no need for him to return. But if he had only returned! Then Durn would never have served as chief advisor, lining up greedy barons to back his eventual bid for power. Now Alor was dead and Durn stood with those barons as the Populists. The country knew no peace now in three long years.

Nolder walked among his troops brooding. They sensed it, he knew they did. It had been some time since he strode among them confidently, resolute and proud. In the early days it had been easy, he thought, to stand before them self-righteously proclaiming his birthright, extolling their heroic virtues in supporting him. But those memories were fading, awash now in smears of blood and uncertainty. Now the men

looked at him with no love in their eyes, most looking to him as if they just wanted to live until their next payroll. This was not the way he intended things to be.

Longing for some companionship, he sought shelter in the tent of Yulicles, for many years his father King Alor's court wizard and now his, as well. Nolder wondered if the wizard knew just how much of his own credibility rested on the fact that the court wizard sided with him?

"You are troubled," the aged wizard said, never looking up from his brewing potion.

"You are wise," Nolder agreed. "The war drags on and I am racked by doubt."

"Yes, as you have said before. Be patient, young one."

Yulicles approached Nolder and put a reassuring hand on his slumped shoulder.

"Is there anything that can be done with ... I mean using ..."

"Sorcery?"

"Yes, sorcery."

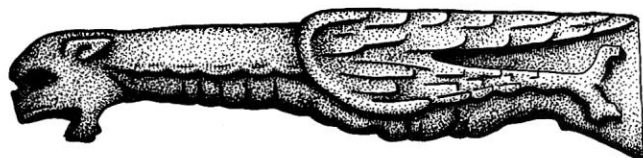
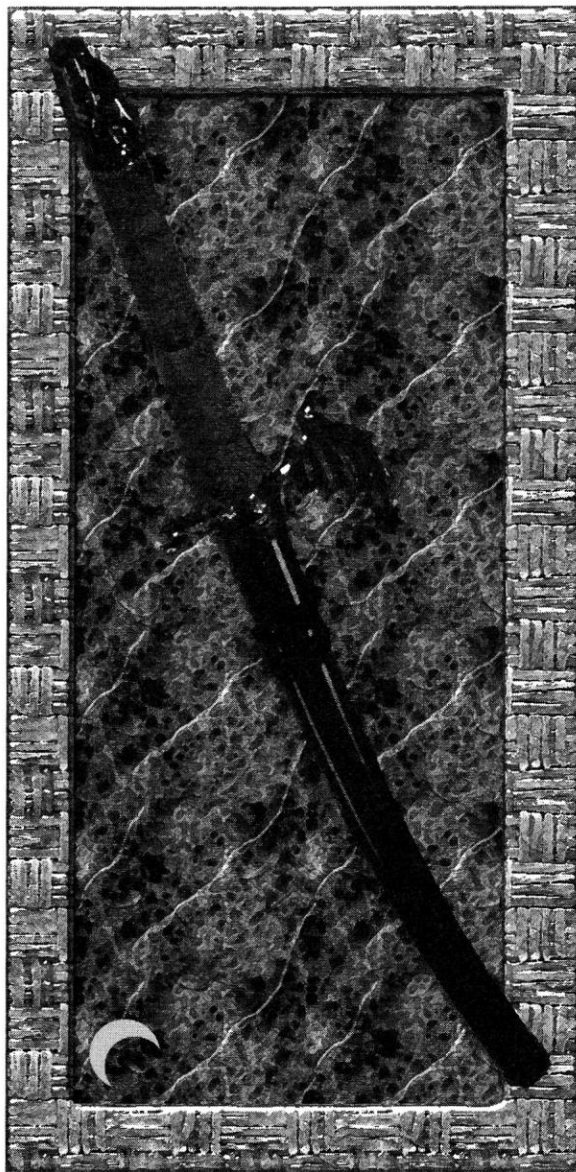
"Perhaps. I'll see what I can do."

In the meantime, be of better cheer when you walk among the troops. They need to believe in the strength of their new king."

With that the king returned to his duties and the wizard set about his own. He assigned his best clerics and scribes to pour through the ancient scrolls one more time. Surely something had been missed, some legend or prophecy, something that might help Nolder. Weeks passed while the army's mood soured and young King Nolder became even more reclusive, when one day a scribe sought Yulicles with a single, tattered scroll.

"A sword?" Nolder asked of Yulicles who petitioned to see the King immediately. "What manner of sword?"

"A magnificent blade, or so the legend states," Yulicles approached and unrolled the fraying parchment. "The 'Blood-Dew' sword was wielded originally by your great-great-great-grandfather's eldest cousin, who sat briefly on the throne during the Troll Wars. The sword was forged for him so that only the true monarch of the realm might wield it. Unfortunately he was slain and



eaten, and the sword fell into the hands of the trolls of the Cracked Mountain."

"And presumably they still have it."

"Yes, presumably. You should send an expedition at once to ..."

"I'll go myself."

"My lord, that may not be wise. The army may not hold together without your presence."

"Nonsense. Use the last of the treasury to pay them while I'm gone, and they'll stay. I'll be back in a fortnight." And Nolder assembled a group of his bravest warriors, ten swords in all, and they rode away that very evening bound for the wildlands and the Cracked Mountain.

That legendary mountain, split down the middle as if by the fist of a mighty god, stood tall and solitary in a land where it seemed to always rain. Nolder and his men approached brazenly, slaying a few troll patrols on their way in, scorching the remains so they did not rise up to follow them. One of his warriors, Bren, had adventured in the Cracked Mountain once before, so knew an entrance that led them right into the heart of the wicked troll warrens. They emerged into the throne room of the depraved troll king, a bloated specimen reclining on a fly-swarmed heap of dung. Troll guards caught unawares were slain by Nolder and his men by the dozens in a desperate battle. In just ten minutes the throne room was secure, the slaves gone and the fat troll king in chains.

"We're looking for a sword, a magical one," Nolder said, digging his dagger deep into the king's lumpy flesh.

"Give it to us and you live!" Properly motivated, the king revealed his treasure trove and Nolder secured its prize item, a magnificent glowing blade. It fit his hand nicely, balanced and curved just so, enormous but light. When it cut the air it hummed strangely.

"Let's get out of here," Nolder ordered, and the troop led the chained troll king at knife-point out through the warrens. Nolder ordered torches lit, two per man; trolls respect fire, he told them. He only let his hostage go when the Cracked Mountain was far behind on a misty morning.

Nolder found new strength with the magical Blood-Dew sword in hand. They rode two full days and nights before resting. But on rising with the dawn both Bren and the sword were gone. Crestfallen, Nolder and his remaining men continued the return journey in silence.

"The battle is brewing," Yulicles informed the king when he returned. "Durn and the Barons are arrayed against us. Desertions, my lord, are high." The army was a shambles, Nolder could see. Those who had not fled were too few to stand against Durn's horde. Resigned, Nolder sounded assembly and positioned his scant troops to fight the final battle.

Durn moved first, sending a wing of lance-armed caval-

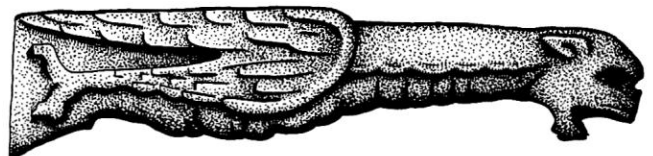
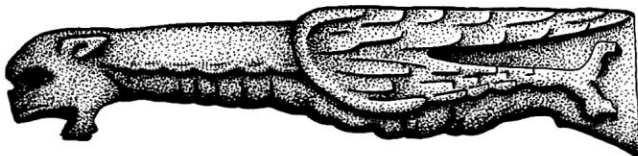
ry far to the left flank in an attempt to turn that side of Nolder's small Loyalist army. Even at the distance that separated them the Populist cavalry's thundering hooves pounded the earth and sent fear through Nolder's ranks. On the right he advanced his skirmishers, all archers of some repute, and they loosed volley upon volley against the Loyalist right. Too far to affect the men from his position in the center, Nolder could only watch as death rained down upon his men and many dropped their weapons to run.

Nolder refused both flanks, ordering his left to keep facing the approaching cavalry and his right to retreat out of archery range. Only an enormous cheer from the Populist army drew Nolder's attention away from his messengers and scribes. Durn had advanced before his army on a barded warhorse, holding a curved glowing sword in his hand. It was the Blood-Dew sword, Nolder knew it. As he feared, the traitor Bren took the stolen blade to his true master. Now that magic, too, stood against him, and Nolder despaired. Raising the sword high and slashing down with it, Durn launched his center into a furious, screaming charge.

"Men," Nolder cried, summoning the last of his courage and strength, "we win the war or lose it here and now! Charge with me! Charge!" Nolder spurred his charger forward and the ramshackle remains of his Loyalist following hoisted their weapons and ran along behind. The two armies slammed into each other in a deafening roar of shouts and slashing blades. Nolder struggled to hack his way toward Durn, to face his enemy personally, but even in the confusion of battle he could see that something was amiss. Durn, battling not twenty yards away, cried out in pain and steam rose from his body. The sword in his hand had turned from bright white to blood red, so hot Nolder could feel its heat even at that distance.

"Get this damned thing out of my hand!" Durn screamed, falling from his horse onto the ground. Soldiers from both sides stopped fighting and yielded ground around the struggling lord. The sizzle and stench of burning meat wafted sickeningly along the wind as Durn slowly roasted alive, desperately trying to shake the red-hot sword from his grasp until his last breath. In a moment it was over, and the sword turned once again to cold steel laying atop Durn's smoking corpse.

The surrounding battle had all but stopped. Nolder walked his charger easily up to Durn's body and dismounted. He cautiously touched the Blood-Dew blade and grabbed it up. No longer hot, even icy to the touch, he raised it up over his head and his Loyalist comrades gave a great cheer. The Populist host, leaderless and agog, either bowed down to Nolder or dropped their weapons and retreated slowly. Cheers went up as Nolder turned with the magical weapon in hand. "Long live the king!"



Faithful Lightning

The taverns of Willoway on the Sea are full of tales regarding the foolishness of the emirs of the nearby Zuretistahn. The primary justification the sea-going people of Willoway have for deriding the Zuretistahni rulers is the Willowayans' firm belief that only an imbecile would establish a nation within the depths of a desert. The unwary visitor to Willoway, while pausing over a mug of ale within one of these taverns, might well be tempted to argue the logic of this assertion—particularly if he were aware of the origins of the walled city of Zureti as a trading post at an oasis midway along the route between Willoway and the mountain fortress of High Cappela. However, in speaking his mind thusly, the unwary traveler would certainly err. For like wolves descending upon a strayed lamb, the scornful Willowayans would quickly set out to teach him the error of his ways by reciting numerous examples of the Zuretistahni emirs' demonstration of their lack of sense.

One such tale concerns the fate of the two-handed battle sword named "Faithful Lightning." As a Willowayan might explain, the family line of the original emirs never produced the bravest of souls. Each emir in turn maintained his rulership by weight of his purse rather than by his personal charisma and battle prowess. Still, for the common citizens, certain appearances must be maintained, even in Zuretistahn. This is particularly true at times when the nation is threatened by outside forces such as an invading army or perhaps a marauding dragon. Whenever the Zuretistahni army must be fielded, then, the current emir would don a ceremonial suit of golden, gem-studded armor designed to make him appear heroically huge and ferocious. Then, mounted upon the back of a war-horse bred within Zuretistahn specifically to carry this weight (from a line of beasts fully two hands taller than any others to be found in the region) the emir would ride out onto the field of battle—his person surrounded by a crack unit of knights whose sole task it was to ensure that no enemy came close enough to actually confront their lord.

At such times, the emir would also carry, belted upon his back, an immense ancestral sword called "Faithful Lightning" (so named in honor of an ancient prophecy of the Zuretistahni people, concerning the swift and deadly justice to be meted out by their god at the end of days). This sword was of such a size that neither the original emir nor any of his descendants were actually able to swing it in battle; they could barely hold the thing aloft with both hands. In fact, a few members of the line were unable to lift it at all from out of its scabbard; it was all they could do to bear its weight upon their backs. It must

be remembered, however, that it was never the plan of any emir to participate in any melee. Rather, the sword was designed primarily to enhance the emir's appearance of heroic stature.

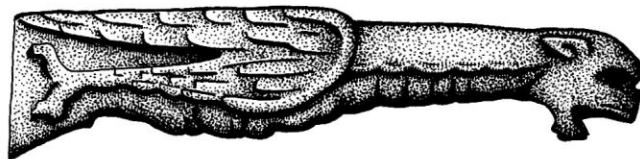
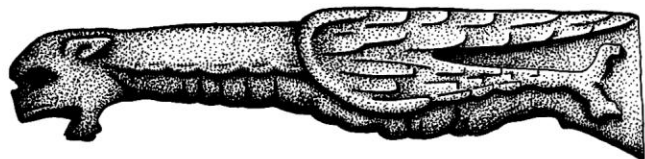
Still, even the most timorous of men secretly wishes he could be revered as a hero, and that has been as true of the Zuretistahni emirs as of anyone else, despite their propensity for mercantilism rather than martial prowess. So it was that Marrat II, 8th Emir of Zuretistahn, hired Wystendril the Mauve to become his court wizard, and assigned to the wizard as his first duty the enchanting of the ancestral blade, so that it might truly become an instrument of destruction in the emir's hands.

Wystendril considered his task carefully. At first, he thought to enchant the blade to make it light enough for even the most diminutive of future emirs to wield. But then he decided that this would be a waste of magical effort, as the express purpose of the emir's knights was to prevent their lord from actively participating in any melee. Some other sort of magic must serve, then.

The blade's name, "Faithful Lightning," gave the mage a new direction in his task. If the emir wished to appear truly heroic upon the battlefield, would not the flash of lightnings from his mighty sword achieve this end? Marrat was ecstatic when the idea was presented to him, so Wystendril set to work immediately.

Given that the emir's family had never demonstrated any talent for magic, yet wanting this, his first commission within the emirate, to be made memorable, Wystendril decided that the sword would have to draw upon the powers of nature itself to create a sufficiently dramatic effect. Whenever drawn from its scabbard, the blade would commence to summon storm clouds to darken the sky above its wielder. Within minutes, lightnings would begin to flicker within the hearts of those clouds, and the sword would then tap that energy to fuel itself with electrical power. As a result, the sword's bearer could then cast deadly bolts of lightning at his enemies, inflict shattering claps of thunder upon them, and even (as an unexpected side benefit) shock with the touch of his gauntleted hand.

Emir Marrat was delighted when "Faithful Lightning's" new abilities were explained to him, and he praised the wizard mightily. Then he set out to find some excuse to give the weapon a try in battle. The emirate's traditions concerning the use of the emir's battle armor, war-horse, and sword dictated that only in a time of national threat could these items be pressed into service, and Marrat was not the sort to flaunt those traditions for his own pleasure. Still, he was not a man without guile. By banning a select group of desert tribes from the city of Zureti, and thereby depriving them of the use of its water, he forced a confrontation with the leaders of those tribes. When the



tribesmen came en masse to discuss the affront with him, Marrat declared their presence a threat to the capitol and took this opportunity to don his armor, mount his war-horse, heft his newly enchanted sword, and lead his soldiers forward into battle.

All too eager to show off the new powers of his sword, the emir declined the tribesmen's invitation to parley.

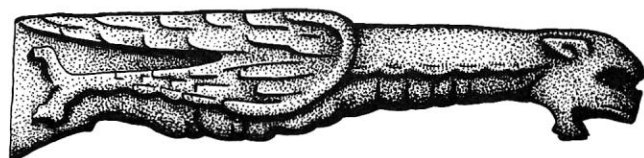
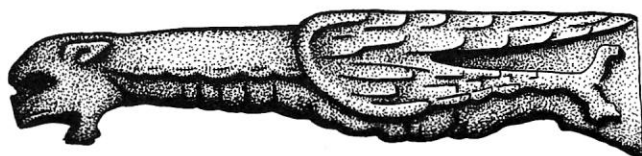
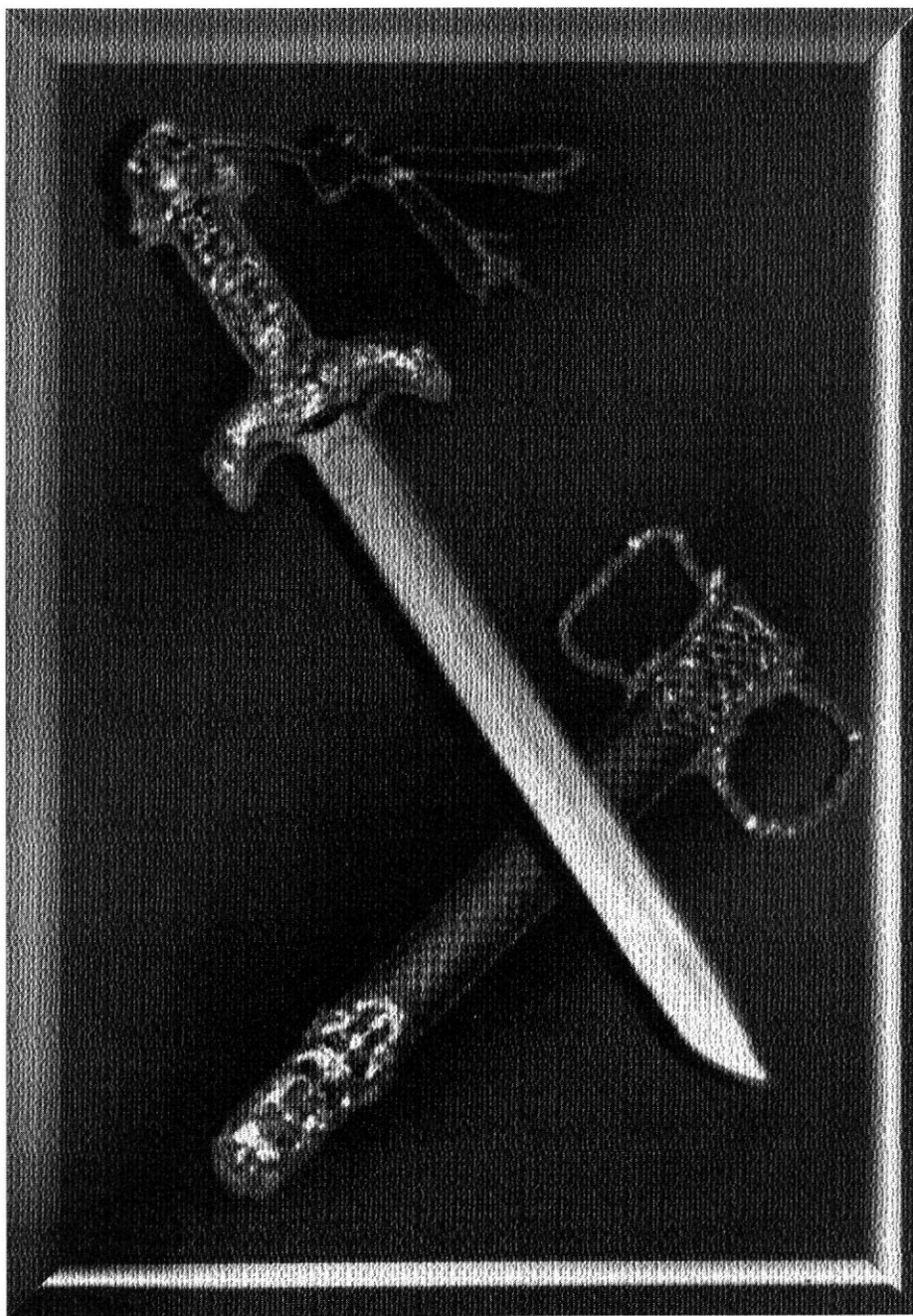
Safely encircled by his army, he drew forth "Faithful Lightning" and held it aloft in his two hands. Before the astonished eyes of all assembled, the sky began to darken with gathering storm clouds directly above the emir's position, lightnings began to flicker within those clouds, and the emir's magic sword began to siphon off nature's power. A dim light began to glow around the sword, and the emir's armor soon took up this glow as well. The emir's war-horse whickered nervously as its mane and tail began to bristle out, crackling with static electricity. And the emir's cloak seemed to take on a life of its own, wrapping itself tightly to the emir's form and clinging to the charge built up within the emir's armor. The emir began to chuckle, an evil bubbling of laughter from deep within his throat, and slowly he lowered his crackling sword to point it toward his enemies.

The desert tribesmen had seen enough. As if by magic, they produced bows, slings, and crossbows from within their robes and all let fly at the emir as one. While many of the missiles fell short of their mark and landed within the ranks of the emir's gathered army, more than enough reached the emir himself, perhaps drawn by the static charge that had built upon his person. Of these, many

found their way into joints of the ceremonial armor, and with a strangled cry, the emir tumbled backward off his horse. As he struck the ground, the power gathered within his sword discharged itself of a sudden, flashing through his assembled army to scorch men hither and yon, and causing a clap of thunder that deafened them all. Before they could recover, the desert tribesmen swept through their ranks, forcing their immediate surrender.

And so it was that the city of Zureti fell into the hands of the desert tribes and the lineage of the nation's emirs was permanently changed. The tribesmen's most senior chieftain was crowned as new ruler of the emirate, and one of his first official acts was to sell

"Faithful Lightning" to a northern barbarian who was on his way to visit the southern kingdoms, where he planned to make his fortune.



Bloodwell

Excerpted from *A Treatise on Druid Organization, Chapter Six: Cults and Abnormal Groups*, by Aileen Faliner

Among the most gruesome of the known druidic groups is the so-called Blood Worshipers of Rina. Seemingly confined to that far-off continent, Blood Worship is a relatively new phenomenon, first showing up in Rinan records almost two centuries ago, when local constabulary broke up what they thought was a murder in progress, but which turned out to be a Blood ritual of the type commonly seen in Rina now.

The name Blood Worshipers is a misnomer, and certainly not how these odd druids refer to themselves. Referring to the spilling of blood required at each ritual or meeting, the name calls up fanciful images of lunatics murdering helpless sacrifices, or crazed vampire lovers dancing around a gory altar. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. The Duski, as the druids call themselves, when they bother to differentiate themselves from "normal" druids at all, revere nature in all her guises, just as their brethren do. According to their beliefs, the power of nature is represented in life, from plants to animals to magical beasts, even rocks and rivers. Every blade of grass, goblin, slug, and shrieker acts as symbols of nature's strength.

According to the Duski, blood is the ultimate symbol of life, and it is that symbolism that gives it its power. Blood represents life, which represents the strength and power of nature, so what could be a more natural way to help invoke that power than with blood? An important distinction to make, however, is that the Duski do not kill or use unwilling donors during their rituals. To kill while symbolically invoking the power of life is counterproductive, as is drawing that symbolic life from a captive. To do so turns the blood into a mere possession, say the Duski, and it becomes nothing more than another liquid, losing all representational value.

No, the blood spilt during the Duski rituals must be freely given, either by the druid or a willing worshipper, and never is so much taken that the donor's life is at stake. In many parts of Rina, worshippers who give their blood during a ritual are fed afterward, and neighbors and friends do their work for several days, to ensure that the donor regains his strength quickly. If this is not possible, the druid himself or one of his friends will remain nearby and watch over the donor for a few days, ready to help if required.

An interesting byproduct of this reverence for blood is the Duski propensity for hunting vampires. Though dealing with the undead is generally left to clerics whose gods

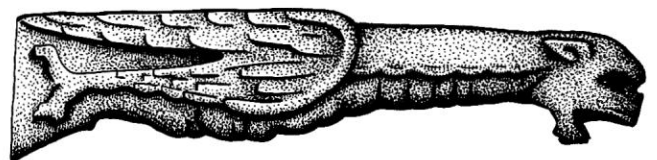
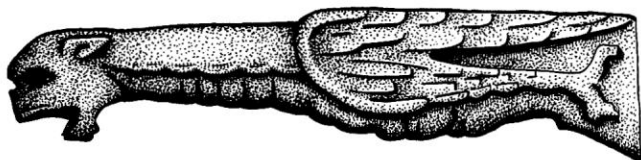
have power over such creatures, the bloodlust of a vampire offends all Duski to their very core. Again, it is due to symbolism—a vampire consuming blood represents a victory of unlfe over life, the unnatural draining of the power of nature herself. Because of this, Duski are the most renowned vampire hunters of Rina, and they are regularly called upon to investigate possible vampire sightings. This they do without compensation or judgment, as they see the destruction of vampires and their spawn as just one more duty to perform to protect the natural world.

This dislike for vampires goes all the way back to the founder of the Duski, a druid who called himself Dusk. Dusk spent many years deep in Rina's jungles, observing the world around him. In time, Dusk received a visitor—a vampire fleeing hunters in the nearest city. He was quite a charming fellow, and he asked Dusk for permission to settle in the area for a short while before moving on. The druid granted it, for his knowledge of vampires was very limited, and the two had several intriguing philosophical conversations over the course of the next week. It was during one of these conversations that Dusk drew his conclusions about blood and symbolism, inspired by the vampire's explanations of why he fed and how his hunger differed from that of a normal man.

After a week, the vampire, which had found no other food nearby, was driven by hunger to attack Dusk. The druid called upon the power of the sun, but it was not strong enough to stop his attacker. Putting his theories into practice, the druid cut his own arm deeply, allowing the rich blood to drip from his outstretched fingers, and called again upon the sun. This time, a blinding light filled the room and turned the vampire to ash. Sadly, Dusk bandaged his arm and bade the vampire good-bye, knowing it had only acted according to its nature and in the process had taught him a valuable lesson. The druid felt it was his duty to share what he had learned with his fellows, and he left his home the next day to do just that.

Scholars have argued for years about why blood made Dusk's spell more effective. Some claim the story must be false, though modern Duski produce the same effects; others feel that once the druid believed blood was required, his focus was weakened unless it was present; and a few claim that blood truly is a source of power, whether symbolic or not. Regardless of what the scholars believe, the druids Dusk found certainly believed him, and soon all of the druids in the jungles had joined him in a loose coalition, the precursor of the current Duski hierarchy.

The Duski idea of blood symbolism took hold in other areas as well, and peasant villages began requesting that the local druid use blood when blessing their crops, afraid that the prayer would lack potency without it. It



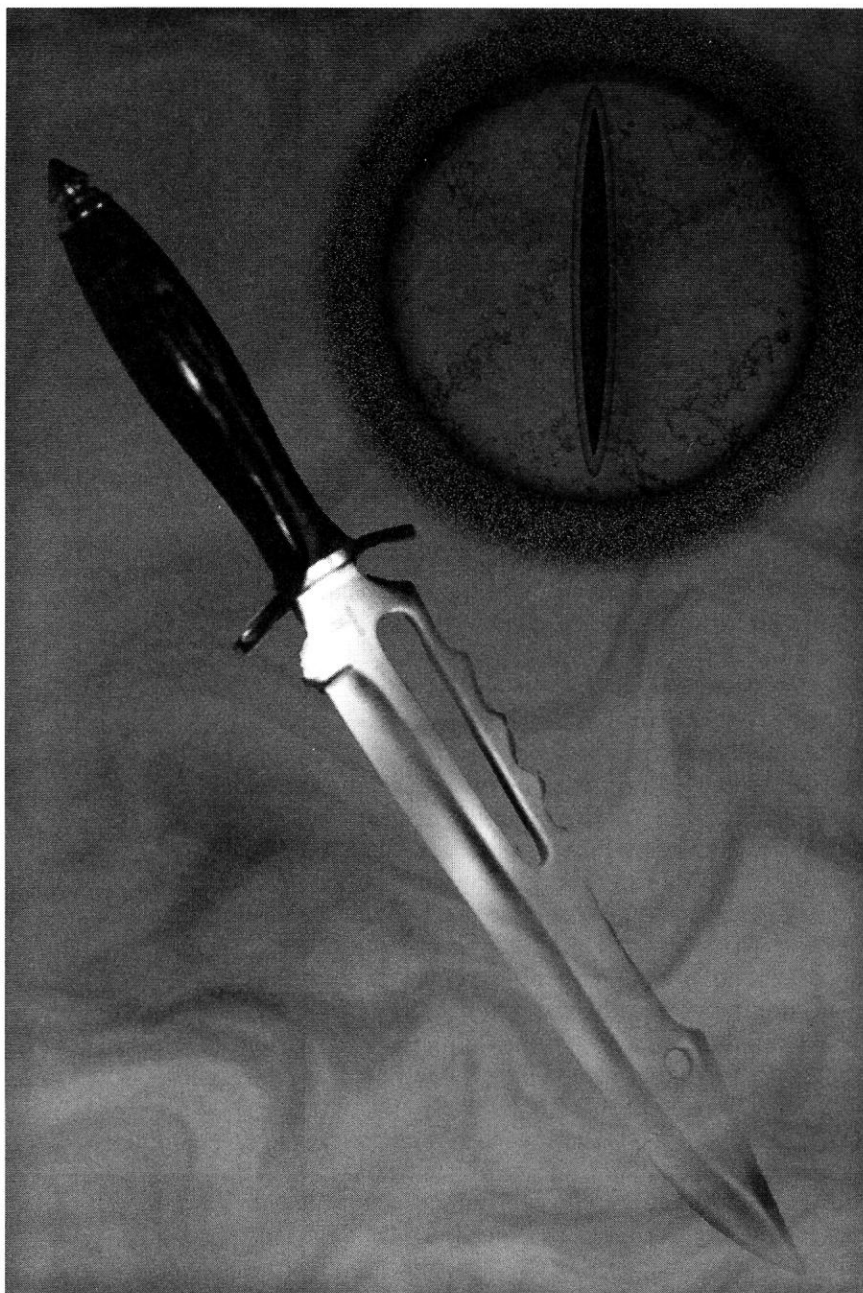
was just such a ritual blessing that the soldiers stumbled on when they first discovered the Duski in action, and the druid was taken to the local lord and questioned closely. His answers convinced the lord that the druid meant no harm; in fact, the lord, already a druidic follower, began to spread word of the blood symbolism to his friends, ensuring the growth of the Duski way of thinking.

As Duski influence spread, more and more of the druids were approached by peasant and nobleman alike with reports of vampire activity. The Duski were quick to investigate, and over the course of a year, a full 10 druids were slain by the vampires they sought. They were simply no match for the creatures they hunted. Dusk saw this occur and was saddened, for he knew that the average blood-drinker would always be stronger than the average druid. In response, he gathered several of the strongest Duski in Rina and resolved to make a weapon for younger druids to use against vampires.

The weapon he chose to enchant was a short sword made for him by a skilled elven smith, with a short blade lightened by two small holes and a colorful wooden hilt. (Though a short sword is not a standard weapon for a druid, the scimitar is not native to Rina, and Rinans use short swords instead). He and his companions took the sword deep into the jungle, back to where he had slain his first vampire. The dust that was all that remained of the vampire still lay on the floor, undisturbed, and Dusk solemnly gathered it up.

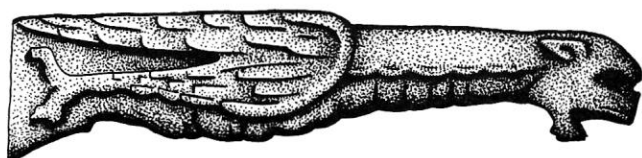
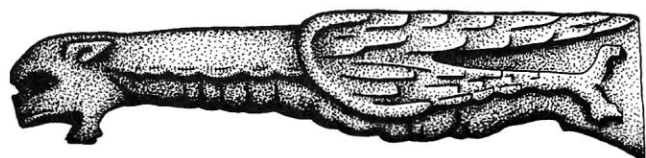
Nearby, in a small glade overgrown with foliage of all kinds, the druids set to work. Each of them gave blood to the enchantment, which was drawn into the hilt of the sword. After a day of singing, chanting, and bleeding, Dusk added the final ingredient—the ashes of the vampire, which the sword drew into its blade. Their work complete, the druids rested.

The sword, which Dusk named Bloodwell, proved to be all that the druids had hoped for. Able to call down a pillar of fire, restore some effects of negative energy attacks, allow movement between trees or into solid stone, as well



as summon powerful light that could destroy the undead, the weapon had a uniquely Duski cost. Though the blade itself powered some abilities, many required the wielder's blood, which was drawn out through the skin of the hand and directly into the hilt. Bloodwell's users had to be careful to use the weapon only when they truly needed to.

In modern times, Bloodwell is kept by a high-ranking druid and given out to Duski vampire hunters on a case-by-case basis. It is always returned after the vampire is slain.



Spirit of the Horse

In the dry, flat plains that cover much of the land between civilization and the fur-wearing barbarians of the far north, there is little to break up the monotony of the landscape. Only scrub grass and bushes grow in this seeming wasteland; there are no trees to build with. The hard-packed earth holds few nutrients, making agriculture a near-impossible task. Indigenous animals are few and hard to find. The sun beats hot in the summer, and snow falls freely in the winter, and there is little cover available from the elements. For all these reasons and more, the plains are avoided by civilized beings, save for a few heavily trafficked trade routes. For all these same reasons, the plains are the chosen home of the Baghruz people.

The Baghruz are a strange people, full of superstition and distrust, yet possessed of a lust for life that can only be admired. Horsemen all, they learn to ride before they can walk and spend more time on horseback than on their feet. Indeed, the horse is the closest thing the Baghruz have to a god; shamans give homage to and call upon the spirit of the mighty beast, and the birth of new foals is celebrated as loudly as the birth of a human child. At home in their surroundings, the Baghruz are the acknowledged masters of the plains, defending their territory fiercely from monsters and humanoids alike.

To ensure their survival, the Baghruz are split into many tribes that constantly wander on predetermined paths older than anyone remembers, never gathering in too great a number. This helps keep overgrazing by the horses to a minimum, and it stops fights from escalating into full-scale wars that would hurt the Baghruz as a people. Each tribe is ruled by a chieftain, who keeps a semblance of order and leads raiding parties against nearby tribes or anyone else they find on the plains.

Raiding is like a game to them—indeed, it is expected, and each tribe's challenge is to spot the others first, then protect themselves from raids while stealing as much as possible in return. People and animals are taken, and people stolen in this way are made full members of their new tribe. Indeed, some Baghruz will be members of five or even more tribes during their lives, transferring their loyalty to their new tribe each time. After all, are they not all Baghruz, regardless of tribe? And to them, that is what matters.

The chieftain of each tribe commands his people, but even he must bow to the will of one greater. The chieftain of all Baghruz is called the Khan, and he commands the loyalty of all tribal chieftains, able to call upon them and their tribes at will to perform whatever tasks are needed to help the Baghruz as a whole. He is said to be the cho-

sen vessel of the horse spirit, and he is even worshipped by some of his people. The Khan is the heart of the Baghruz.

But it was not always so.

Until 200 years ago, there was no Khan of the Baghruz. Alliances and friendships between tribes helped keep war from breaking out, but no one had more power than the chieftain of a tribe. If he decided to ride into battle, the tribe did so. If he ordered them to move, they did. His word was law, and there was none to gainsay him. As a result, tribe sometimes wiped out tribe, and Baghruz killed Baghruz, simply to satisfy the ambitions of an unworthy chieftain. And the shamans of each tribe saw this, and felt in their bones that it was wrong.

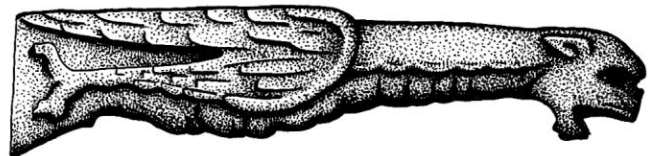
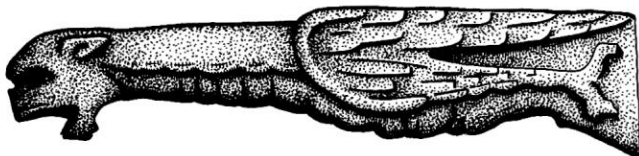
One evening a vision filled the thoughts of the shamans, and they knew what they must do. Every shaman of every Baghruz tribe got on his horse and rode to their most sacred spot, known only to the shamans—the place where the First Horse had taken his first earthly steps, his hoof prints burned into the very ground, never blown or washed away. And when they had all arrived, they began working.

Some carved and polished horn and bone, while others worked the forge. The rest searched for other ingredients, led by visions and dreams. Finally it was done, and the shamans observed what they had made—a scimitar, shorter than some, but with a blade that could cut straight through a man. They had done what they could; now it was the horse spirit's turn.

For days, the shamans danced and chanted in that holy spot, each eventually giving in to exhaustion and being pulled away by his horse to recover. The last shaman fell as the sun rose on the fourth day, dying as he collapsed. When he hit the ground, the sun flared over the horizon and the sound of hoof beats and neighing filled the air, as a ghostly brown steed leapt over the blade, shrinking a bit as it did so, then disappeared. The blade called Spirit of the Horse was complete, and it held the power to make of one person the leader of all the Baghruz.

As the shamans recovered, they faced another task—deciding to whom the blade would be given. Again the horse spirit provided, for that very day a man rode into the holy site, delirious and near death. The man, whose name was Jobarr, explained that he had been ordered in a dream to mount his horse and let it have its head, going wherever the horse wished. The horse took him to the shamans, but he had been attacked by monsters en route and had not eaten or drank since he left his tribe. The shamans placed the Spirit of the Horse in his hand and he was fully healed, by which they knew they had chosen correctly.

Jobarr went back to his tribe and quickly became chieftain, supported by his tribe's shaman. He then traveled





when he died.

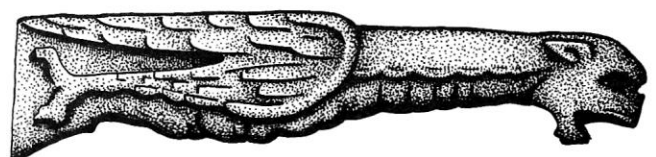
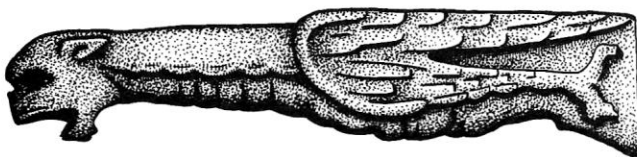
Liyah ruled as Khan as wisely as her father, and when she died the holy blade and the Khanship remained in the family, as it would for the next hundred years. The rise of an ambitious man named Noghrul signaled the end of the Jobarr Khanate, however. Noghrul was a close friend and advisor of Periz, the Khan at the time, and he saw a way to ensure his rise to the Khanship. Noghrul manipulated Dashim, Periz's only heir, into murdering a newborn foal, telling him it was diseased and needed to be put to rest. He then exposed this deed to the shamans, who after examining the dead foal declared Dashim guilty and cast Dashim and all his heirs into exile forever.

Dashim had many friends and allies, however, and they followed him, calling themselves the Dashimi and journeying to the far western plains to live. Meanwhile, Periz sorrowfully declared Noghrul his heir and died of grief soon after. When Noghrul grasped the Spirit of the Horse and began the Noghrul Khanate, the holy blade grew white hot for a moment and was forever changed, cursed by the horse spirit to be an object of desire and obsession.

Despite the way he took power, Noghrul proved to be a strong and insightful Khan. His children followed his example, keeping peace among the Baghruz as Khans after he died, all the way through to the current Khan, Noghrul's great-grandson Tirin. All is not well among the Baghruz, however. For

from tribe to tribe, speaking with the other chieftains and attempting to convince them that a Khan was needed, and the horse spirit had chosen him. The power of the Spirit of the Horse made itself felt during those discussions, as did the influence of the shamans, and 20 years later Jobarr had succeeded in creating the title of Khan and securing his claim to it, with very little bloodshed. Thus was born the Jobarr Khanate, and the Spirit of the Horse was passed from Jobarr to his daughter Liyah

the past several years, Dashimi have been infiltrating Baghruz tribes, making allies and preparing for a coup of their own. Dashim's great-grandnephew Harabin is determined to regain the Dashimi place in Baghruz society as well as his own rightful title, and he plots constantly to this end. Many among both the Dashimi and Baghruz follow him, and his planned uprising cannot be too far off. Should he succeed, surely Harabin's righteous hand on the Spirit of the Horse will cleanse it of its curse?



Talking Sword of Strength

The rogue Lawrence mused for the tenth time in as many hours that among the Green Races, the DragonGoblins had a very unusual sense of humor. He was manacled to a cold, stone wall and was seated upon a large pile of very uncomfortable gold coins, worth several kings' ransoms. Admittedly, he had come to this swampy kingdom to steal as much of this treasure as possible. Now the monsters he planned on stealing from had given him his wish, after a fashion, imprisoning him in the middle of one of the largest treasure chambers in the world.

Getting caught was always a major embarrassment. He tested his bonds for the hundredth time and wondered how the DragonGoblins could have known about all his hidden lockpicks, placed in 10 different areas of his body. They'd even found the one in his hair, and no one had ever found that one before.

"Hay, buddy, you want out of this jam?"

The rogue didn't have the slightest idea who was talking to him in the darkness, but the new voice sounded promising.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do; you take me with you and I'll free you from those enchanted manacles and help you fight your way outta here, deal?"

"Fine, what do I have to do?"

"Well, I'm under the gold by your left foot. Dig in here and get me out."

The thief didn't know what the voice was talking about, but he dug into the pile anyway. His foot came sifted through coins and then onto the pommel of a sword, and he dredged it up.

"Ah, now that feels great. I was under that pile of gold for 10 years and 13 days. That's way too long of a vacation, if you ask me."

The rogue felt a rush of amazing strength in his limbs, like they were made of steel, and suddenly he was able to snap the chains that bound his wrists as if they were thin string.

"I have the ability to open anything twice a day," the sword commented, "but not wasting it on those manacles was smart. Let's go kill us some DragonGoblins, what do you say?"

"I say we find you some kind of sheath and I finish what I started."

Lawrence moved among the mounds of treasure and found his backpack thrown onto one of the larger piles of equipment. He took out a coin of light, and the cavern filled with a warm glow. The vast treasure cavern was a delight to behold, as shiny coins, gem-encrusted chalices, coffers spilling over with faceted jewels, and solid gold

spheres from the size of his head to four-foot-tall balls of gold, weighing several hundred pounds, all winked a cheery hello to the greedy eyes of the rogue. As Lawrence moved around the area, he took only the best of the treasures lying there. He found a magnificent sheath for his blade, studded with perfect blue-white diamonds. The sword maintained that it was a waste of good gems, but it seemed to like the fit as the rogue fastened the sword belt around his waist. Normally he used a short sword, but figured he'd gladly learn how to handle this wondrous weapon.

"I would strongly advise you not to get too weighted down with the treasures of this chamber. We have a lot of fighting to do before we get out of these warrens. There are several magic items you passed as you looked for my new sheath. I imagine you will want to collect those. I can detect magical items and will happily use that power in your service."

"Well, you are just filled with surprises, you noble blade."

The blade guided the thief to all the magic items, but the last one proved too big to place in his backpack. Lawrence and the sword stood in front of a huge metal statue.

"I think it's called a shield guardian, and I think the ruby amulet you placed in your pocket controls the thing. Put on the amulet and give the statue a command, and let's see that happens."

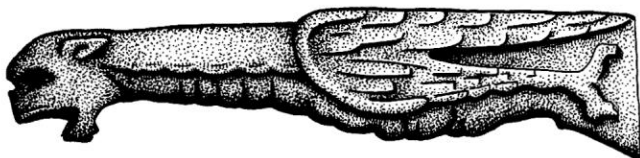
Lawrence was ever the willing student of things magical. He usually checked out magical items before experimenting with them, but his newfound sword hadn't led him astray so far. The gold chain of the amulet settled around his neck, and the eyes of the shield guardian lit up bright red. A smile came to the metal monster's face.

"Oh, this is going to be unusually rare," the rogue whispered to himself. "There are a few little friends you really have to meet, and I would like you to greet each and every one of them with that."

Lawrence pointed to a huge sphere of solid gold. The sphere stood four feet tall and was perfectly round. There was no doubt in the man's mind that it was solid gold. He couldn't even budge it before he had found the sword. Now, however, his magically given strength allowed him to roll it around easily and even pick it up with some straining, but it was way too cumbersome to move around a lot. The shield guardian was able to pick it up in one huge hand.

"Well, my friend, I have your measure now. What I would like you to do is roll or toss that little round sphere in your hand at all the DragonGoblins you see. Let's discover together how long it takes to break all of them, shall we."

The best of the jeweled chalices, loose jewelry, and gem-



studded rods were all safely tucked in the thief's backpack, along with all the magic items of the cavern. It would take Lawrence time to figure out all of those enchanted items, but that was all part of his wonderful profession. At the moment, though, it was slaughtering time. He gestured for his newfound ally to go first.

The iron bound portal to the treasure chamber burst open. The chained black dragon looked up with tired eyes. It had seen the human being chained by its captors, and now the fool walked behind a giant in metal. Hope lit the eyes of the monster.

"Free me," the 90-foot-long monster wailed, and it presented its chained neck lock to the pair. The chain holding the dragon had links larger than Lawrence's body. He knew neither he nor his new ally could burst those bonds, even with his newfound strength.

"Oh, I can open the monster's bonds with a bit of my magic," the sword said, anticipating Lawrence's thoughts, "but I don't relish the idea of fighting this huge thing when it's free."

"I think we'll be okay, and there is something unusually fitting about freeing more chained creatures to roam the halls and eat whatever snacks can be found. Work your magic, sword."

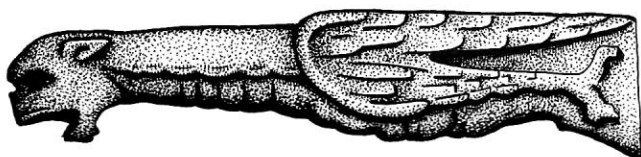
A touch of the blade to the chain caused a chiming sound in the sword, and the locks glowed and released. The dragon burst its bonds and threw itself out of its cavern and into the midst of DragonGoblin revelers

in the adjoining chamber. Over the next hour, the dragon did most of the work needed for the rogue to escape. Occasionally, though, it was necessary to throw the

sphere of gold into a massed group of monsters. It was amazing what the rolling sphere did to bodies and bones.

Sometimes the sphere went rolling for hundreds of yards down sloping corridors. There were several times when Lawrence and his statue had to fight their way to the sphere's stopping point. Lawrence was a rich man many times over with just the treasure in his pack, but that sphere of gold was coming with him no matter how many monsters he had to fight his way through. Besides, the shield guardian was taking all the attacks. In fact, his new sword was growing very surly as they waded through hundreds of monsters. It wasn't getting to chop its fair share. Something odd was going on as the weapon cut through armor and into the flesh of the DragonGoblins they faced. Every time it touched a monster's blood there was a small burst of light. It startled the rogue in the first few passes in the battle. It took him several deaths to realize the weapon was magically doing more damage to all the Green Races creatures he successfully struck. Lawrence noticed right away that it didn't happen with the giant spiders they had to fight their way

through. He certainly didn't mind the enchanted effect, but it did take some getting used to.



Telepathic Blade of Dragonkind

There are many legends about the famed Blade of Dragonkind. What is known for sure is that there is a magical blade that keeps appearing when the city and it's heart need saving from some deranged deity or awesomely powerful lich. The weapon is always used by a young fighter who usually dies in the effort to save the city, but never before the Blade of Dragonkind is buried in the heart of the evil foe. Time and time again when the city needs aid from raging dragons descending upon it en masse or undead armies boiling up from underground, this weapon and its young user are found at the forefront of the battle, killing the worst and most powerful of the city's foes.

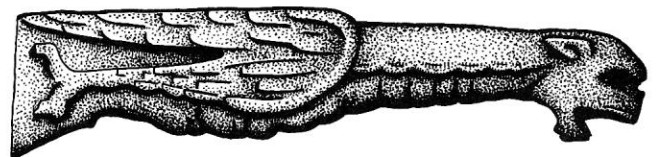
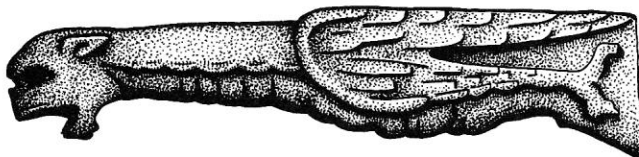
The blade is of elvish manufacture, made using metal tempered in the heart of a volcano. Many legends talk of the metal of the weapon glowing bright green to ward off enemy spells. The blade is also known to hew easily through even the thickest monstrous limbs in the heat of battle.

The Legend of Dalton the Hero: The city guard of Dragonkind was famous for its training and its weapon skills. Its members were also noted for their size. Most guardsmen were well over six feet tall and had muscles on top of their muscles. To be a guardsman of Dragonkind, a fighter had to be both tough and smart. The equipment given guardsmen was excellent, and the training was brutal. Guard duty consisted of weapon training one day in three, and guard duty seven days, with the eighth day off. In the city of Dragonkind, reverence for the order of a town guardsmen was up there next to that of the gods. Guardsmen could go where they willed and arrest whomever they wanted, and almost all of them had magical abilities or powerful magical equipment. The guardsmen were mentally scanned every month to make sure they maintained their lawful state of mind.

One particular bright and clear morning, a young man named Dalton rapped on the portal of the city watch. His huge club thumped hard into the metal of the door, making a rather large dent. Dalton stood back, hoping he wouldn't have to pay for the dent as he only had three silver in his money pouch. The door opened to reveal watch officer Stonebreaker. He was a towering six foot seven and all muscle, but he was still two heads shorter than Dalton.

"You are a large lad aren't you," Stonebreaker said, looking Dalton up and down.

"I wish to join the city watch," Dalton replied. He was



immediately let in, because Stonebreaker didn't want to even contemplate trying to stop this mountain of a boy. Stonebreaker took the lad to the practice green at the center of the castle. Even at this early hour, there were 30 different guardsmen there, hard at weapon practice. All the sparring stopped when Dalton came in. Baiting new petitioners was the absolute favorite pastime of veteran guardsmen.

Weapons master Heartwood had Dalton stand in the middle of the green as he looked the boy up and down and inspected his hands and weapon. Dalton's club was four feet long, two feet wide, and carved in the shape of a courtesan. It also weighed at least 20 pounds, and the very strong Heartwood knew he wouldn't be able to use such a weapon skillfully.

"Tocktal, use your quarterstaff and hit this lout three times," Heartwood said. "Boy, you will use your club and try to hit Tocktal once."

Tocktal Ravenheart was the company's best quarterstaff man and quicker than a cat. Only a few guardsmen were willing to bet on the newcomer—at four-to-one odds. The lad only nodded his head and walked to the center of the battle-training circle. He understood that he wasn't supposed to leave the circle.

Tocktal rushed the boy, holding his staff in a two handed grip that would allow him to strike with either end. Like lightning Dalton's weapon flashed out. As Tocktal brought up his staff to block, the club cracked through the middle of the staff and broke it in two. Tocktal was thrown out of the circle with the force of the blow. Cheering went up among the other guardsmen. Heartwood was all smiles at this new recruit. Dalton would be a fine addition to the guards, but the weapons master needed to check a few more things first.

"Well, lad you swing a mean club," he said, "but you have to know other weapons as well. Go into the armory over there and pick a sword, and you and I will spar a bit, blade to blade."

Dalton didn't say a word as he walked into the armory, but many eyes followed him.

Inside were racks and racks of the highest quality swords and spears. Dalton naturally went over to the two-handed swords and tested several of these seven-foot-long blades, handling them easily. They looked small in his huge hand. He went through several practice sword forms with each of the blades, testing their weight. His father had taught him the sword; Dalton just preferred his granddad's club.

Suddenly, a voice in his head said, *pick me*. He looked up, and on a high shelf cut into the wall 10 feet above everything else was a dusty old sword.

Yes, that's right, the thoughts flowed into his head. *I'm the one you want to use. Pick me.*

It was a short leap for his tall seven-foot frame to grasp the hilt of the old weapon and bring it down. He took out an oilcloth from his pack and wiped a sheen of oil on the blade. He noticed the unusual sharpness and the fact that the hilt had now changed shape to better fit his hand.

We need to get out on the green, the voice said. *They are growing impatient, and you and I have many things to do in the years to come.*

Dalton put the cloth away, attached his club to his backpack, and walked out, blade in hand, onto the green.

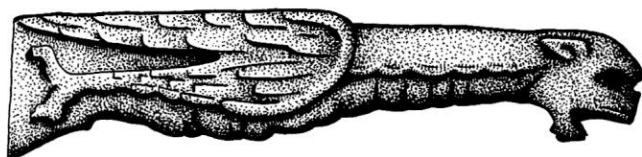
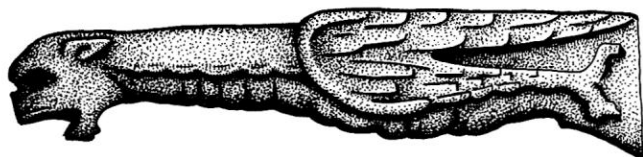
"Now boy, why did you pick that one of all the blades to be found?"

All of the men knew the history of that blade. The magical weapon was a prized possession of the guards. The blade always picked its next user, generation after generation. Thirty-seven brave warriors had used the blade in the service of the city thus far. Only two of those had lived more than a year after acquiring it.

Heartwood knew he could never spar with the boy when the lad used that weapon. The Blade of Dragonkind was for killing. All knew the rules for its use. Dalton would now become a leader of the guard. He would take men into the thick of every danger, and that blade would find the heart of the worst offenders. In a society of killers, where betting was done on everything, not one of them was betting on how long Dalton would live using that blade. His days were numbered, but until he was put to rest in the crypt of the city's heroes, all the men of the guard, from the oldest graybeard to the newest recruit, would follow him into hell.

Dalton became the center of a tornado of activity. Over the next three days, he was fitted with the best in armor and shield, given training in tactics and the laws of the city, and given the rank of guard captain. Every morning and evening, he trained with his new blade, but always alone. Special, and horrendously expensive, animated statues were constructed to allow him to fight deadly opponents. His blade mentally whispered suggestions for his stance and style, and time after time the weapon sheared through the metal or stone of the golems and shield guardians, taking off arms and heads.

Dalton began walking the city with his own band of city guard. He was given the elite of the elite. Moving through the city streets, he always knew where to go to find the worst enemies of the city. Dalton and the blade uncovered hidden temples of evil, deadly undead nests, and frightful pockets of chaotic magic. In every case, the blade helped Dalton find the evil leader, and Dalton and the blade killed horrifically powerful foes, while his band of men guarded his back and died protecting him. For 14 months, Dalton worked to restore order to the city. He became a legend in his own time, but his greatest battle was yet to come, and that's another story.



Dragonheart Blade

The Dragonheart Blade was an expensive, last-ditch effort to stem the terrible tide of battle going against the DragonElves. In the days of the creation of these weapons, huge BronzeMen armies were streaming into the forested kingdoms of the DragonElves. Although the defenders were more powerful, the numbers of the BronzeMen armies were too overwhelming. Ten humans died for every elf, but there were still more humans pouring over the border. DragonElves loved magic over most other things, and their solutions to terrible problems were always through the use of enchantment. That is why they came up with the arcane advisory blades.

In the hands of nonDragonElves, the blades were telepathic and worked powerful magic in favor of the blade's makers. One such story of the blades' use follows:

Shordan Darkheart, Corperlus of the Tenth Threecian Guards, walked the night camp very pleased with itself. Six feet tall and broad shouldered, dressed in well-used bronze battlefield armor, it looked every inch a proud BronzeMan warrior, a true commander of men. But Shordan wasn't even close too human. Darkheart was a Tal-e-dan, one of a rare breed of what the BronzeMen called the Green Races. Long ago Shordan had been assigned to infiltrate the ranks of the BronzeMen to find out how they thought and did things. The creature found it liked the chaos caused by the humans. It liked the killing the humans took up wherever they went. Forgetting its race, the creature joined the humans for good and rose in the ranks to become a Commander of Ten.

Not liking the grim faces it encountered among its men, it started one of the many talks it had heard other commanders give on the eve of battles.

"Men, why such long faces? I've fought with you too many times to believe you're scared. These DragonElves aren't the gods we once thought they were. I've placed many a steel blade in their guts, and you will too! Think about what you are fighting for: land, green land as far as the eye can see. A land where those damned Green Races from the South have never set foot. They've taken our homelands, but those green monsters can't get us up here. All we have to do is win tomorrow, and each and every one of us will have land for the families we all have coming up behind us. That's worth a few risks, isn't it?"

Stupid humans that they were, they all nodded, but they still needed a bit more pushing. The Tal-e-dan didn't care how many humans or DragonElves died in the battle. It just loved the chaos spawned from the fight. The more creatures it killed, the more powerful it grew. The monster was already far more powerful than most of its

kind, and tomorrow's battle would make it supreme among its race.

"We're going to celebrate our victory a little early. Here, enjoy this." Shordan pushed out a small barrel of weak wine. There was only enough for two large tankards for each man, but it would make them forget for a while, and that's all the commander wanted. The night passed, and at sunrise the battle began.

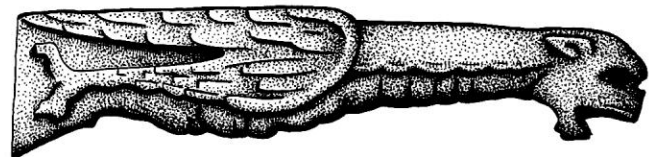
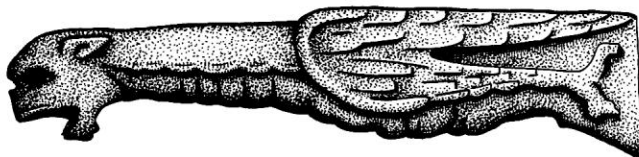
The battle was deadly for both sides. DragonElves were magical, dangerous creatures. In the predawn darkness, the land they fought over lit up brighter than the sun with the magical energies spawned by the battle. The DragonElves threw everything they had at the BronzeMen army. Walls of flesh-burning fire brought down the first wave of bronze warriors. Shordan walked in that first wave. While all the men around it were falling in searing pain, it was able to slash at the DragonElves and kill them as they tried new magics on its flesh.

Darkheart liked being in the front of battle. It fed off the chaos energies warfare created. Moaning in pleasure, Shordan's over-sized steel sword cut through dragonish arms and necks in the swirl of battle. As the blood of elves coated its sword and flowed down the blood groove to Shordan's hand, arcane strength filled its body as it fed. Often it would thrust its hand into the open wounds it made, sucking the last bit of life out of the magical foes. Each death in this way made Darkheart stronger and reinforced its shape-changing ability, more firmly establishing it as human.

The second wave of bronze fighters was ripped to pieces by white lighting energies, making flesh burst wherever lighting sparks touched. The hardy Threecian Guard stopped their advance for a moment, as hundreds of their numbers died before them. Some would have run then, but how could they when they saw good old Shordan battling in amongst the enemy. Surely, if one old veteran of many battles could survive the attacks of these false gods, the rest of the army could as well. With his fine example in front of them, they charged to his aid.

After many hours of very pleasant death and destruction, Shordan roamed the now-empty battlefield. The Tenth Threecian Guards were now only a memory, as all of them had died in this battle. This fact didn't matter to the roaming Tal-e-dan. There were other BronzeMen army groups, and Shordan could easily insert itself into one of them.

The creature didn't usually walk among the dead after a battle. A single memory kept it searching. One of the DragonElf lords had been especially difficult to kill. There were perhaps 50 dead BronzeMen around the foe when Darkheart reached the fight. That elf's weapon creased Shordan's arm, and the creature's normal healing powers



hadn't been able to seal that wound. Shordan wanted this weapon for its own. The swirl of battle had pulled Shordan away from that fight, but it had seen the DragonElf lord hacked down at last.

One of the larger piles of dead was hiding Shordan's prize. Throwing bodies left and right, the Tal-e-dan uncovered the DragonElf lord's body with the sword hidden under the dead form. Thinking of the great new pleasures awaiting it with that sword in its hands, Darkheart reached down and grasped the dragonish hilt.

"Arrrrrrgh!" the monster screamed.

The dragonheart sword activated its magics and inspected the soul of its new host.

On the empty battle-field, there was no one to see this new struggle between victim and aggressor. No one saw the Tal-e-dan screaming in pain as it rolled on the ground. No one saw the monster's hand turn into its original talon, with flesh burning from the sword. No one witnessed the human face turning more bestial, then turning into a DragonElf face, and then back again to the image that was Shordan Darkheart, the Corperlus.

The spirit locked in the dragonheart sword considered itself lucky this time.

"Oh yes, this is much better." The dragonheart sword was now in total control, as it practiced moving the lips of the monster turned human.

"My, what bitter irony. I find myself controlling a monster that was controlling humans as it pretended to be a

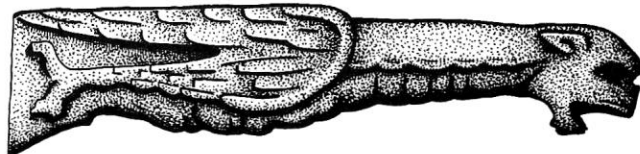
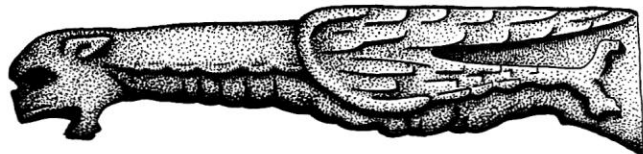
human. My DragonElf creators would be so amused. I wonder if I'll ever be able to get word to them."

Flexing its new muscles, the spirit of the sword contemplated, as it often did, its creation in the magical forges of the DragonElves. It was created to cause chaos among the

enemies of the DragonElves. The magics of the sword would, within a few years, change the monster into a DragonElf. Until that time, it would walk among the humans, making their life a living hell.

It now controlled a highly magical host. Using the innate powers of the monster, it could transform into anyone it saw. Casting its senses around the area, the sword noted three other dragonheart swords in need of new hosts. Moving to collect them, it used the memories of its new host to figure out who should receive these fine weapons in the armies of the BronzeMen. No sense giving these prized possessions to other lowly Corperlus when there were Commanders of One Thousand to be gifted. The sword briefly thought the next few months would be hard times for the BronzeMen. Maybe they should seriously consider going back to fighting the Green Races. Now there was an enemy you could sink your teeth into.

For the first time in Shordan's life, the monster whistled a tune in pleasure—a BronzeMen fighting tune. It jauntily walked off with three huge swords strapped to its broad back and an unusually fine sword at its hip.



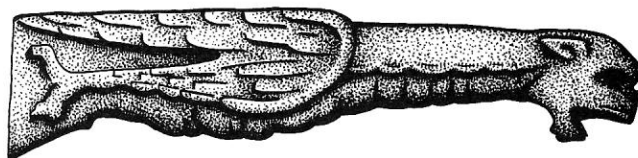
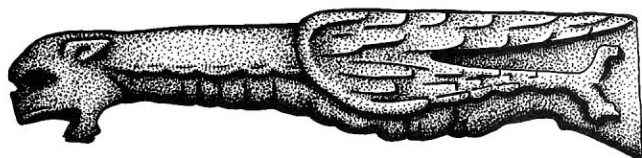
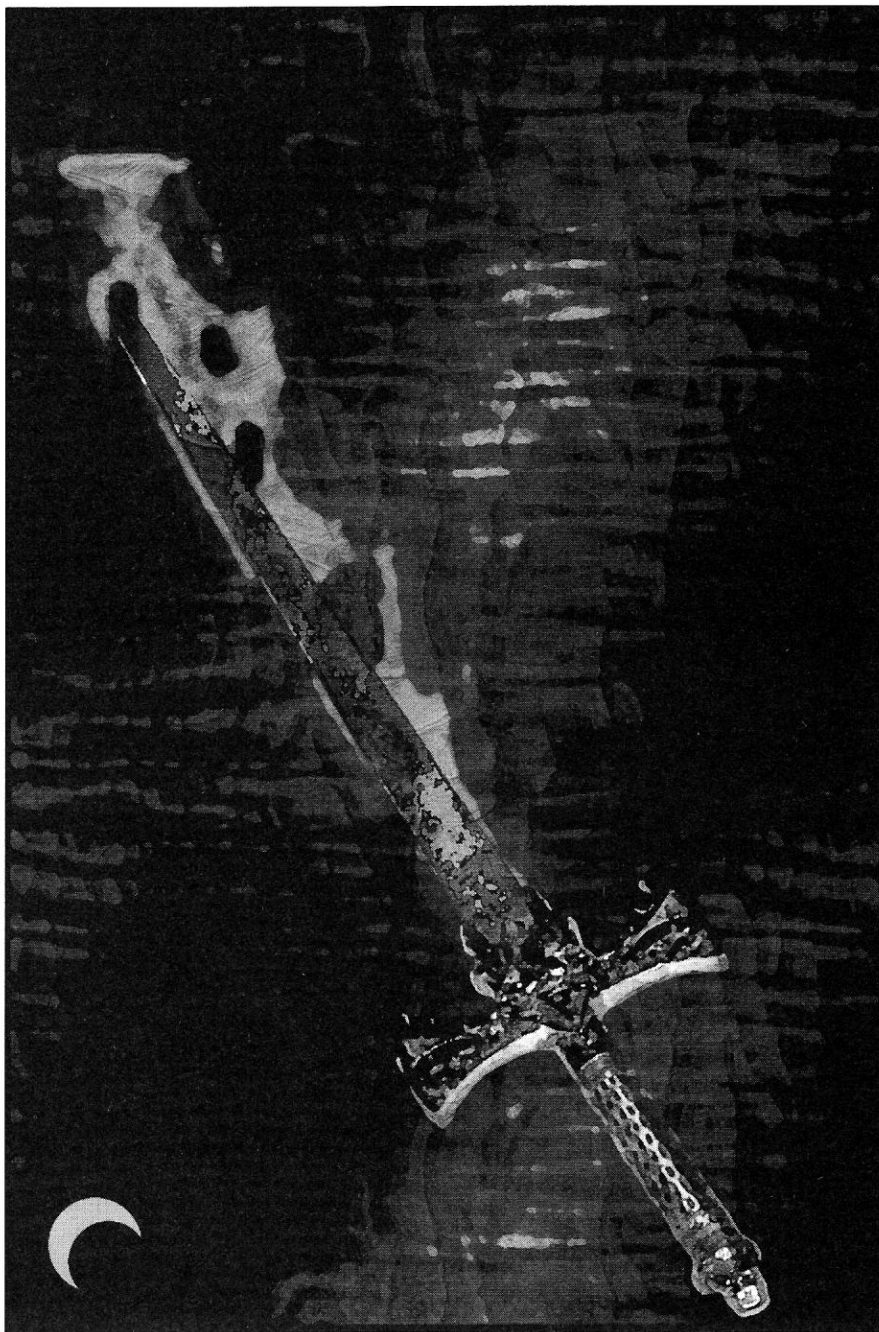
Sword of Challenge

Mankind has forgotten much about its early rise from beasts to intelligent beings. It's still possible to suffer terrible dreams at night and have a racial memory, causing a person to wake up screaming like a monkey. The long-lived elves remembered, but they made it a habit not to talk needlessly to nonelves about the past. There were far too many deadly sins committed in the name of the elves for them to talk of another race's history.

In those very ancient days, the undead vampire emperors ruled the world with an iron-clawed hand, and little was known about a vampire's true nature. Vast underground kingdoms were populated with the half-beast/half human slaves of vampires and vampire kin. At the same time, these half-men roamed the earth, being treated like animals by the elves and other intelligent races above the ground. At night, vast armies of undead wraiths and wights, all commanded by vampire leaders, would strike out against the elves and other intelligent creatures of the above-ground lands. The undead were like a sea of terrible destruction, not caring how many of their number died, as there were always more living to turn into undead. Little was known at that time about the nature of the undead and what would be effective in attempts to destroy them. Holy water wasn't even created yet. The gods of the elves and other races were just as much at a loss as their worshipers concerning what to do about the undead menace invading the world. The gods, on the other hand, had many more resources than their followers. Using divine powers, they discovered the effects of garlic and holy water. The light of the sun also became a potent weapon in the battle for life or undeath. Slowly, word spread through the lands, the holy wisdom about undead and how to fight them. It would be millennia before the iron grip of the soulless undead

would be broken, and it never wholly left, as nests of fearsome undead can be found lurking in every climate and terrain to this day.

In those long-ago days, in their suffering, the ape-like creatures cried out for aid to the very spirits of the air. The half-apes were perfect slaves for the undead. The creatures were used to fetch and carry as well as tunnel out the many new caverns the ever-growing populations of undead needed for their vast underground cities. Through clever breeding practices, the vampire kings made their apes more and more intelligent. They were



still too bestial to feed the hunger of the undead, but that wasn't a problem, as there were many intelligent races above ground to feed the vampires. The apemen became favored creatures of the vampire kings and were allowed to live in the wilderness above ground, as long as they worked hard in the underground cities across the world. A thousand years passed to find the ape people growing more intelligent and more useful to the undead civilization. They suffered much, as the chaotic nature of the undead often drove them to kill the apes for no reason they could see. Often in their troubled lives, the apemen would call out for help in freeing them from their deadly masters. They were answered by new gods, who helped raise the beasts to a new level of spirit and intelligence, far beyond the plans, or even the desires, of the vampire kings. Mankind arose from these creatures as the gods gave their species a soul and the power of intelligence and wisdom. They still served their undead masters as tasked, but they now started to plan for themselves and act independently.

The cities of the undead were huge, bloated things. Above and below the ground, the world trembled in the fear of the undead. Some headway with the power of holy water and magical spells had been made in pushing back the nightly menace. The world was balanced in a deadly struggle, and no one thought the powers of good would be able to prevail against the huge armies of the dead.

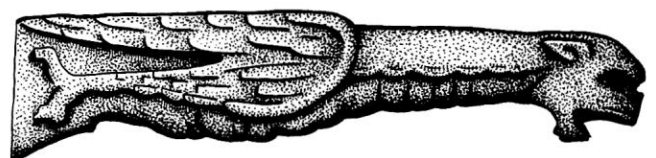
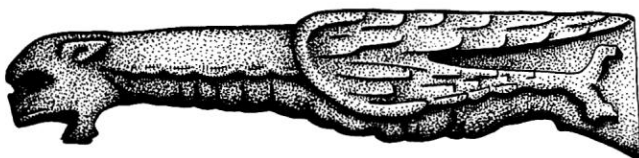
It was the young apeman Atook who first thought to forge a blade to be used against his vampiric masters. The undead had taken an idea from celestial creatures they had fought for a thousand years and started making enchanted swords of evil to use in their struggles. Atook had been trained in the arts of smithing by the powerful vampires, and he was good at what he did. The fires of the forge didn't sear his hardy flesh. The massive strength of his arms didn't falter at the long hours of turning metal into weapons. The vampires taught him and others of his kind to make powerfully enchanted weapons, to help the vampires fight the many dragons and elves of the surface world.

During the day, and at an above ground forge he constructed in the wilderness, Atook began forging a very special sword. His plan was simple. He would make a weapon that would kill his undead masters at a touch—a blade suggested to his mind by the gods of man who guided his thoughts and deeds now. He carved the image of a hooded cobra onto the hilt, an image of evil, but a living evil rather than undead. He thought his plan was foolproof, until one day he was ordered to the throne room of his master, the Undead King. Atook dreamed so hard about his new weapon that he had let his everyday sword work suffer to the point that his masters noticed.

Atook was too valuable a slave to kill or maim. From past attempts, the vampire rulers knew that turning Atook undead would strip away his useful smithing skills.

When Atook started his great project, he honestly believed he would rush into the throne room with his enchanted blade and kill all the undead he found there. He would then lead his people out of the depths and destroy all the many other underground cities filled with undead. When he walked into the throne room with its hundreds of vampires, ghosts, wraiths, and crazed wights, he realized his plan to be foolish. It didn't matter if he held the most powerful blade in the world. He would be overwhelmed by a mountain of powerful undead bodies long before he could reach the throne. He was a broken beast, ready to die or do what he was told. All thoughts of fighting against his masters were gone from his heart and mind. The work of 10 years by his new gods was undone in an instant of insight. His family was brought in front of the throne, and his three little sons were ripped from their crying mother and eaten in front of him. Then his mate of 15 years was eaten as well. He gasped at all this in horror and was then told to work much harder and faster on the weapons of the master race or he too would suffer the fate of his family. He wailed on the black marble floor while the undead around him laughed at his pitifulness. What he loved and wanted to protect with his very life had just been taken away from him as if they were nothing. Not by all-powerful beings, but by bloodthirsty monsters, and Atook suddenly wanted very much to kill them all with his own hands. Their effort had backfired, and they caused their own downfall on that fateful night.

His plans changed that day with the cunning that would allow his race to rule the surface many generations in the future. In the throne room he bowed, scraped, and acted afraid. He was no longer a slave, however, as he only pretended obedience from that day forward. He had a new plan, and it would not fail. He would make many magical cobra-hilted challenge blades and hide them away until the time was right. He would teach other smiths to make these blades, and they would hide them away as well. Eventually, in every city controlled by these undead monsters, there would be many enchanted challenge blades in the hands of his people. His worker people would become warrior people in numbers sufficient to kill the thousands of undead they faced. All the vampires and other undead would be found in a day and destroyed. His people would then be free to walk in the sun whenever they wanted, and that would be his gift to the spirit of his dead family. He stood a little straighter that day as he thought about his plan. Years later, with his pelt almost solid gray, he led his faction of cobra-hilted sword wielding slaves to freedom.



Sword of Justice

The people of the village of Telemp thought they were under some terrible curse of the gods. Telemp was a small village of 90 hardy souls. They were simple farmers, planting their crops in rich volcanic soil twice a year, and reaping far more than they needed. These extra crops were sold in markets in castle towns all along the river below their mountain valley. It was a good life for the farmers, until the raiders came. The raiders were deserters from the wars to the north. Fighters in leather armor on fast horses, they struck the farmers every summer for food, and life became harder for the people of Telemp. The lords of the castle towns used their forces to keep those same raiders away from their regions, but that did not help the villagers. They didn't want to protect a sleepy little town high in the mountains that didn't pay them any taxes.

One day, a huge knight dressed in shining black plate mail rode into the village on the biggest horse the villagers had ever seen. He dismounted and warned the young children to stay away from his horse. Their little mouths dropped open when he told them the magnificent animal was trained to kill anyone who came near except its rider.

"Honor, try not to scare the children too much. We'll get this barding off of you in a little while. I want to sit down in their inn and try not to scare these poor villagers too badly myself. When their fear of me is lifted, I'll give you a good rubdown."

"*That could be never,*" the horse mentally communicated to the paladin. "*If I remember the last village right, they almost hired a small army to get you to leave.*"

"Alas, that didn't go well, did it? Well this one will be different. We will definitely go after we've eliminated their small bandit problem."

The paladin walked into the inn and sat down. It was only then that the men of the village who witnessed his passing noticed that the plates of his armor didn't make any clanking noise.

"I'll take a meal of beef, if you have it. Prepare two large buckets of water and a tub of oats or corn for my horse. I'll be feeding Honor, my horse, as he doesn't take food from any hand but mine." The knight then placed three huge gold coins down on the table to pay for his supplies, and the villagers nearby gasped.

"Noble lord, that's more gold than this village sees in years. I can't give you proper change for that. No one in town could."

"I'll be here for awhile, so don't worry about it. Just bring the meal."

In minutes, a feast large enough for three people was

placed in front of the knight, who had taken off his helm to reveal a thatch of unruly red hair and a trimmed red beard.

Half the village was there by then, having been alerted to the paladin's presence by excited folk, and all the important men sat at other tables and watched the warrior eat.

"I'm told you will have bandits coming to your village in six days. I will bring them all to justice for a small fee."

"Our village is poor. We can't afford to pay you gold. If we fight them, they will kill us all." The fear in the villagers' voices was terrible to hear. The paladin stood suddenly, and the mere force of his presence stopped all their chattering.

"I have no need of your gold, nor do I desire it. Rather, you will help me in the building of a small roadside shrine to Delsenoria, my patroness. She's the deity of love and honor. I work her will with her holy sword, and she lends me strength when I need it."

For the next six days, the village men helped the paladin make a roadside shrine. It was a lovely structure, all done in white marble quarried from the nearby hills. The paladin planted some small, wild red roses, and the next day, miraculously, the entire shrine was covered in the blooming plants. The paladin explained that Delsenoria gave him little boons like that all the time.

"Tomorrow the rogues will be here; you all need to hide before they come. When I begin the battle, I don't want any of you harmed by accident."

The villagers tried to explain that there were too many bandits for one knight, even as powerful as the paladin, to fight. He just smiled, though, and continued to polish his equipment.

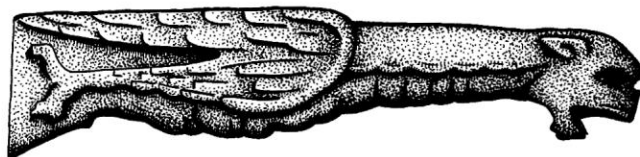
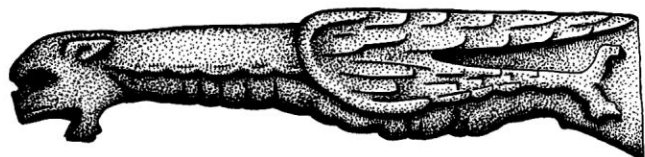
It was high noon when the 50 rogues rode into the small village. They'd brought several wagons pulled by plow horses. Their intent was clear.

The paladin rode forth on his steed and said, "You will leave this land forever, or you will die. It is your choice, make it quickly." He drew his sword, and all the rogues started screaming as their bodies began to glow with a green fire.

Clive, the leader of the bandits, was a smart one and knew his invisibility ring was now useless. He quickly figured that all he had to do was kill this knight and his armor, shield, and sword would make him a rich man for the rest of his life.

"It's a child's magic, ignore the green fire. All we need to do is kill this fool, and the village and its food are all ours. Let's get to work!" The rogue rushed the knight and his charger.

The paladin mentally signaled for Honor to give its commands to all the bandits' mounts. The horse screamed a shrill order, and in seconds, all the rogue horses were



bucking their riders off their backs and racing away down the valley.

The unhorsed rogues weren't given the time to recover as the paladin's holy sword began sweeping down and out. Weighty horse hooves and sword strokes made short work of everyone save for the leader of the rogues. He was a canny fighter, and his blocks and feints were very skillful. In the course of the battle, the paladin never landed a solid blow on the leader. Finally, only the paladin and the rogue remained. In respect for his foe, the paladin dismounted and ordered Honor to stand back. Both knew that if the paladin died in the battle, Honor would finish the fight the pair had started.

"This isn't a jousting field, you fool. You should have stayed on your horse and finished me off!" The rogue was breathing heavily from dodging the holy sword and the charger's deadly hooves.

"My name is Theon, Delsenoria's paladin and lord of the lands of Eiree. I would know your name before we fight again."

"I care nothing for lords and their foolish ways," the rogue spat. "My name is Clive, the former leader of the finest band of cutthroats I've ever known. I find you and your ways wrong. If I get the chance, my short sword is going to punch through that black armor and carve out your black heart!" The rogue slipped his magical ring on his finger and turned invisible, knowing it would do no good while he attacked, but mostly out of sheer habit.

The paladin couldn't fault the man for his courage. Catching the enemy's blade on his shield, he thrust yet

another deadly cut at the rogue to no avail. Clive was good at dodging and evading the paladin's death strokes. The paladin stood back.

"I would give you a chance to live if you would swear to change your ways."

"You can't make me be good at the point of a sword! One of us will die today as you have killed my 49 brothers in arms. I can't outrun you, so I will out match you."

Clive's blade was a whirl of strikes as he continually came under the guard of the holy sword. Several times the blades met and if it had been any long weapon, the paladin's holy sword would have sheared through the metal of the blade and made the weapon a useless stub, but the short sword had too thick a steel blade.

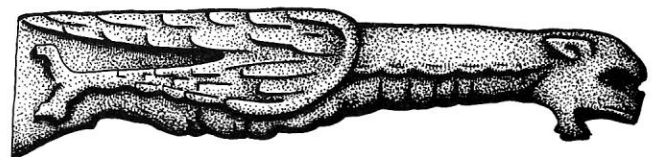
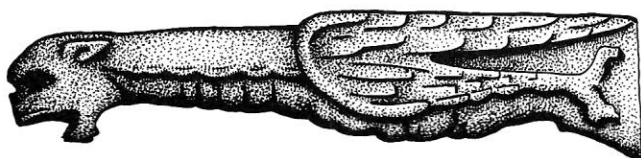
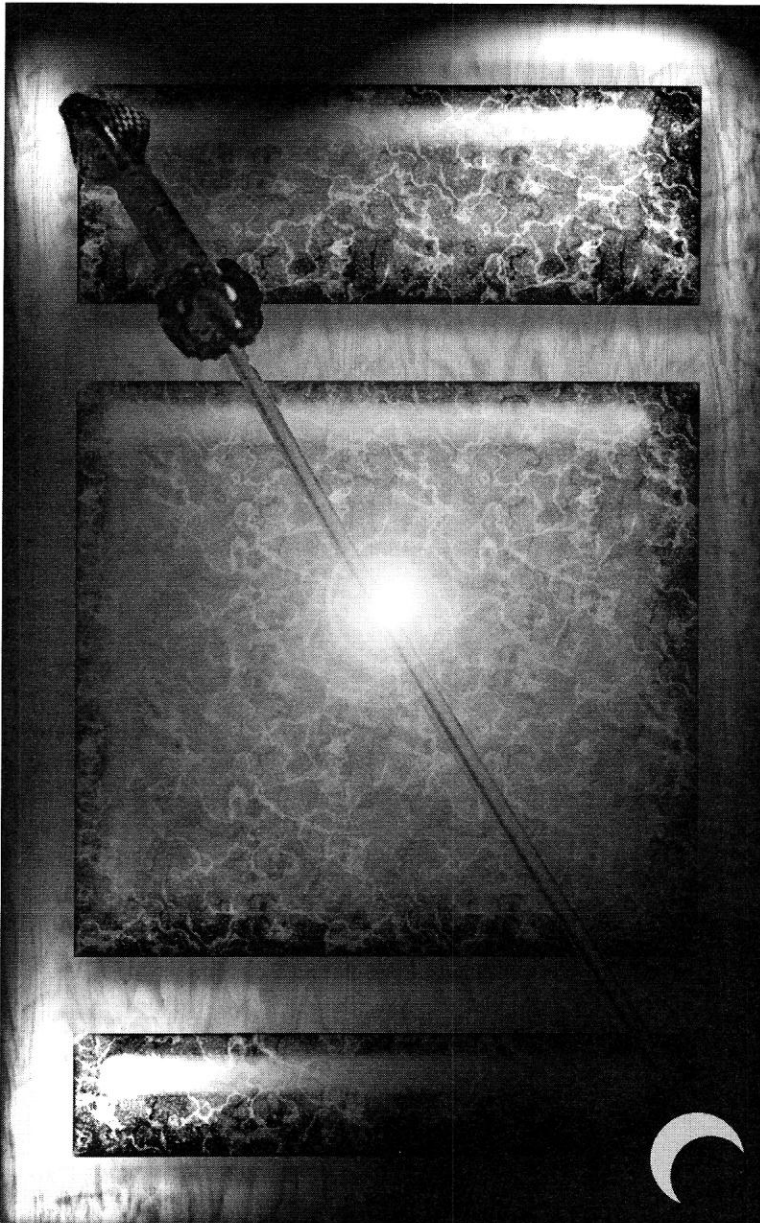
The action of the melee took both men to the side of the shrine. The paladin was still fresh, as his faith put steel in his muscles, but the rogue was weakening. Finally, with the rogue on his knees and the holy sword to his throat, the paladin gave him one more chance to atone for his sins.

"Yield to me, grow crops with these people for one year, and vow never to rob from them again. If you do this, Delsenoria will let you live. Don't lie to me, or the shrine will know and your heart will be stopped by the power of the goddess."

Clive looked up to see the white marble of the shrine turn bright blue as the sky and knew the words of the paladin were true. "I yield. I will help

these people for a year and a day and never return after that."

The paladin left the rogue on the grass in the shrine. He mounted his stallion and left the people of the high valley to sort things out. As he rode down the hill, he sang a love song to a lady named Delsenoria.



Contesting Sword

I, the mighty sorcerer Gorn, wasn't having a good decade.

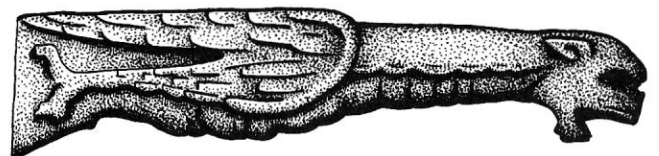
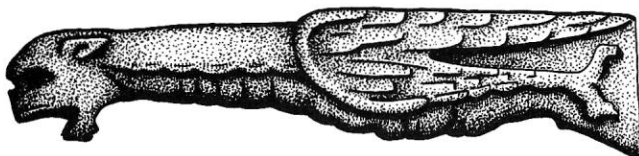
Those years started out all right, as my armies and I pilaged the cities and towns of elves, orcs, and men equally well. I'd manage to fill several hidden treasure caves with the booty from those epic battles. It was also unusually

pleasant to have all those slaves working to build several hidden wizard towers in this isolated cliff or that special catacomb of the recently killed old wyrm.

Then the reverses started, as this paladin-led army or that holy cleric's crusading army splashed against my forces and recently taken cities and died to the last man. Oh, I won all those battles, but it became harder and harder to hire replacement goblins, hobgoblins, and ogres when they knew more sickeningly powerful good armies were rushing down on their fortifications. You just try

training monsters like trolls, giants, and pixies to be even half as effective as 1,000 goblins. Give me a goblin every time to cut up into the backside of an archer infantry unit or hamstringing a band of mounted human lancers. Eventually, I figured I'd sacked one too many of those namby pamby, goody two shoes, holy temples, and most of the deities of every region were working against me and stirring up whatever few worshipers I'd left to them. Who would have thought one god could be so irritated at one close-to-human spell caster trying to earn a dishonest living, let alone 10 deities.

For the next few years, I tried enlisting the aid of the evil gods in a do-unto-others-as-they-would-do-to-you sort of effort. In the beginning of this attempt, it was easy to give them the odd 1,000 still beating hearts or a score of overly attractive virgins. I never did figure out why virgins were so appealing to the gods, they certainly weren't appealing to me. Give me an experienced w.... Well, that is neither here nor there to this story. Suffice it to say that I spent too many hours and far too much gold giving into the never clear wants of snake gods, death deities, and Norse tricksters. All I got out of them was the odd cataclysm or plague, and I was very capable of dealing out that type of damage



myself. It shouldn't be hard for my readers to believe that it gets tiresome quickly to bow the knee to a 30-foot-tall statue made of solid gold. That gold could so much better be used to hire new armies. Yes I admit it; soon I started pillaging evil temples as well as the lawful ones. I mean why not, what's 12 or 13 more irritated deities. When you've got one pantheon mad at you, it's like having them all mad any way. For a while, I did very well along that course and even bought off a few avenging armies and turned them against their divine leaders.

It was in the sixth or seventh year that poor, downtrodden me had to abandoned empire building, and I started looking into retirement for a generation or three, so that the sound of my name wasn't on every paladin's lips as a curse. There were lots of freshly built, well hidden, enchanted towers to live in, and I had my ancient dragon guards and loyal bands of goblins to protect me. I even had a hidden underground city or two that would happily be set up to burst forth from their hidden lairs and fight off my foes—as long as they could do this by hitting them from behind. An uneasy feeling caused me to experiment with golems and the making of shield guardians. For two years, I got really good at building these things. I quickly learned that golems weren't as easy to build as shield guardians. Using quite a bit of my hidden resources, I made scores of the things and positioned them like garden statues around my estate. I found myself loosing track of time as I bent a huge supply of adamantine to my will.

A year and a half later, my adamantine shield guardian was my greatest creation; as I looked on it with pride, I was forced to reevaluate my retirement. In the last eighteen months, my dragons, iron golems, stone golems, remaining goblin hordes, and wood golems were all destroyed by unusually large and enraged bands of rangers, paladins, and barbarians sent by the remarkably cruel gods, calling themselves good, to find my hidden homes and end my sorcerous career. I also made notes to really get the guy who invented arrows of slaying. For 10 lousy grand in gold, one could make a stupid ash wood arrow that burrowed itself to the heart of a giant dragon, killing it instantly. Where's the honor in that? Where's the pride in a job well done? Boy, the days of heroes riding up and tilting lance to giant talon must really be done with. No wonder paladins are 10 to a gold piece these days. It certainly has become a cruel, cruel world.

It was the holy sword of Antioch, wielded in the hands of an exceptional paladin, that finally decided me. The blasted weapon took the head clean off my last golem. All the spells in the world simply bounced off the man as he got closer and closer to killing me. It's a good thing paladins aren't acid proof. (Funny, holy swords aren't either.) I promised myself when I made my new version, it

would definitely be immune to acid pits.

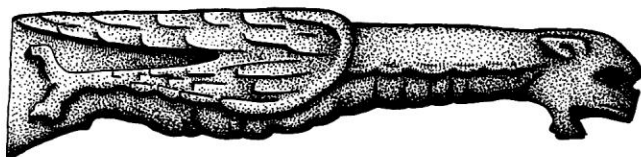
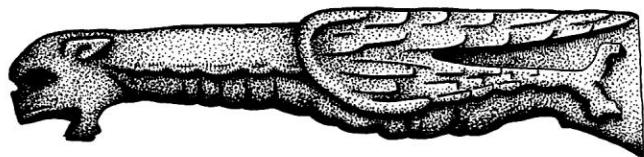
For the next two years I, Gorn, the greatest spell caster in this or any other plane of existence, took up the humble weaponsmithing trade. At first I studied under the masters of several cities. They saw only a humble, strong, young man wanting to learn an honest trade. I eventually learned enough from them to make my own smithing forge in a magically proofed chamber no god could scry into. Then for another year, I managed to fend off the constant attacks of lawful good nuts trying to end my life for this reason or that. It grows tiresome to hear things shouted at you like, "You killed by brother!" or "You destroyed my town!" So what if I was clearly responsible for killing a few million brothers and destroying a few thousand towns. It's like they think I'm a criminal of some type instead of just another supernatural human trying to make a living. Do cooks get yelled at by chickens for beating a few thousand eggs? Do farmers get yelled at by carrots for uprooting thousands of young roots? No, I say, so I was feeling really put upon.

As I take the time to write this little missive to share with the interested thousands wanting to know a little more about me in the distant future, I'm really pleased with myself. I've had a career of amazing accomplishments—from subduing ancient dragons and magical cities of millions of spell casters, to at one time owning all the artifacts ever made in the world—and don't get me started on how badly that ended. To make a long story just a bit longer, I wiped the hard-earned sweat from my brow and had to say, good job, to myself. It took lots longer than I had thought it would. I know my faults, and usually carrying something through to the end is not one of my strong qualities. This time, however, I finished both swords, and they were true masterworks. In the end, I had little left to show for all of my labors of a decade. I only had five hidden sorcerer towers. I was down to my last two treasure hoards. I had only my one adamantine shield guardian to watch my back. Goblins wouldn't even talk to me anymore. It seems harsh words had gotten out about working for me—imagine that.

The two swords stood gleaming in front of me. I'd finished them in the city on purpose. I called to the two large blacksmiths who owned this forge and who had taken a day's vacation for 100 gold each. They came in bowing and humble. A 10-foot-tall moving metal statue can do that to people.

"Please pick up these blades and test their balance."

The frightened smiths did as they were told and picked up the enchanted weapons. In heartbeats the men were completely controlled by the intelligences in the swords. They stood at the side of their new master and didn't let any one or any thing get near him for the rest of their short lives.



Sword of Death

One day, one of the many gods of death was walking the prime material plane, collecting souls and life essences. In those days, death wanted his claimants to see him, so just before death took their lives, the deity allowed them to see his true form. For many, having death come to them was comforting, as he took the dying into his own gentle hands. However, some ingrates who weren't ready to go yet would do foolish things like plunge spears, daggers, or swords into death's body. Naturally, death was immune to all of the threats. In fact, it was impossible to end his life, but the various acts of violence did get death thinking.

Death thought to himself that there were many imperfect deadly ways to die. He could count several thousand things, from deadly snakes to death houses. In those days, all the death deities were perfectionists, striving for the perfect ending. Death thought that if he could make the perfect deadly sword, he would really have made an important statement in the annals of death. With this project in mind, death began to do research.

Spending eleven years, eleven months, and eleven days, and still continuing with his all-important deadly duties, death finished his survey. Death discovered there were 39 different sword and dagger types being used on the prime material plane. Briefly, he thought about going in the past and heading forward in the future to make the survey really complete, but he rejected the idea as not necessary. Of these 39 blades, five of them were responsible for 80 percent of the deaths all blades caused. Of those five blades, death really liked the look and feel of the longsword. Sure, the short sword was more convenient, and the two-handed sword was more impressive, but for sheer killing power in the hands of the common man, the longsword, for death's money anyway, was the weapon of choice.

Drawing from the same primordial ooze that created him, death created the perfect, balanced sword of death. The weapon was razor sharp and never needed sharpening. The blade would glow with blinding light as it took a life; death really liked that little touch. The god of death placed his essence in the blade and found a likely battlefield of elves and orcs to introduce it to the world. He placed his blade, sticking in the ground, for both sides to find. Over the next 91 minutes, 711 orcs and 1,269 elves instantly died as each, in turn, approached and touched death's sword. Death determined that he possibly put too much of his essence in the blade.

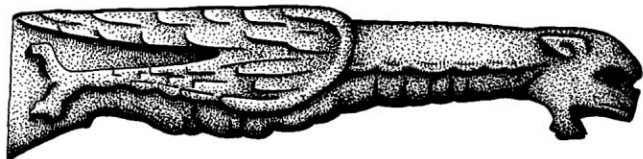
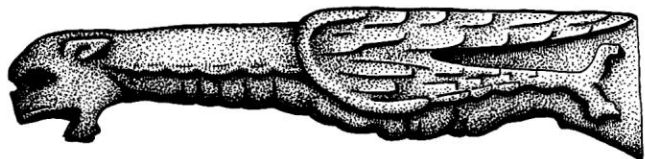
For the first time in millennia, death found himself very dissatisfied. What good was having a razor-sharp blade if the blade wasn't even used? What good was having a

perfectly balanced weapon if the balance wasn't needed? No, he needed to start over and change things. He left the battlefield, shaking his head. That sword was left and continued killing anything that touched it, until a goddess of mercy came along and turned the sword to dust. Even then, for many years thereafter, the dust continued to kill anyone who came in contact with it.

Death's next longsword was drawn from the same ooze as the first, but death placed no enchantments on this blade. For good measure, he made 10 of these blades. They were masterworks of the sword maker's art. Each was razor sharp, unbreakable, perfectly balanced, and immune to the effects of magic. Death added this last as an afterthought, but it seemed appropriate. He placed these swords in the best sword maker's shop on the prime material plane and watched to see what would happen. A fencing instructor came into the shop and bought all 10 of the blades. For the next year, mere boys and inept men used death's perfect weapons, not for death but for practice. Death was enraged for the first time in his immortal life, but there was nothing he could do to change the situation. The fencing instructor wasn't due to be harvested for many years, and it was unthinkable to take him too early. No, death had to rethink his concept.

Death wanted to create a weapon that would become famous on the prime material plane as a blade of death. He wanted the blade to be used a lot for the purposes of dealing death. He also wanted the blade to be a masterwork of perfection. The poor deity almost sobbed in frustration, knowing he could make such a blade but not knowing how he could make it famous and keep it in constant use. For the next hundred years, death wasn't pleasant to be around. An unusual number of plagues and famine took beings on the prime material plane. Also during that time death studied more of the sword maker's art and looked at enchanted blades being used by this or that hero. Heroes took on a new use for the death deity.

Death found a hero he could use. This likely young fellow was destined to be in countless battles over the years, and it would be a long time before he was finally harvested. Carefully studying this hero's fate thread, death determined that with a little unethical nudging of the fate scan, he could give this hero a death blade and millions of deaths would occur. Smiling, death made a perfect deadly blade, even enchanted the blade so the hero would never need to sleep again, and gave the hero a dream with the location of the blade to be found in a nearby cave. Loving when a plan worked out, death watched the hero wake up and adventure right to the proper cave. In just a matter of a few heartbeats, the hero had the blade in hand and wasted no time in starting a killing spree that made



him and his blade instantly famous.

For the first year, death's pet hero did amazing work. The man slashed his way through half a continent; finding his way to the throne of the most vicious kingdom on the prime material plane. The hero enjoyed being the ruler of large armies and leading them into battle. Fantastic female slaves were paraded past the hero. He was given the best in food and wine. For the next year, he tripled the size of his kingdom, leading army after army in battle. Death didn't notice the hero putting on weight and enjoying his captives a bit too much.

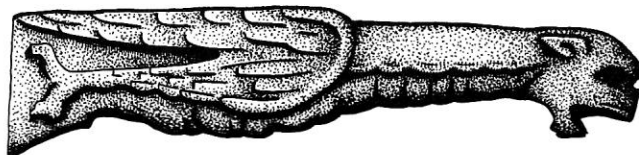
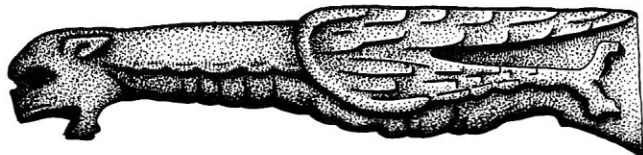
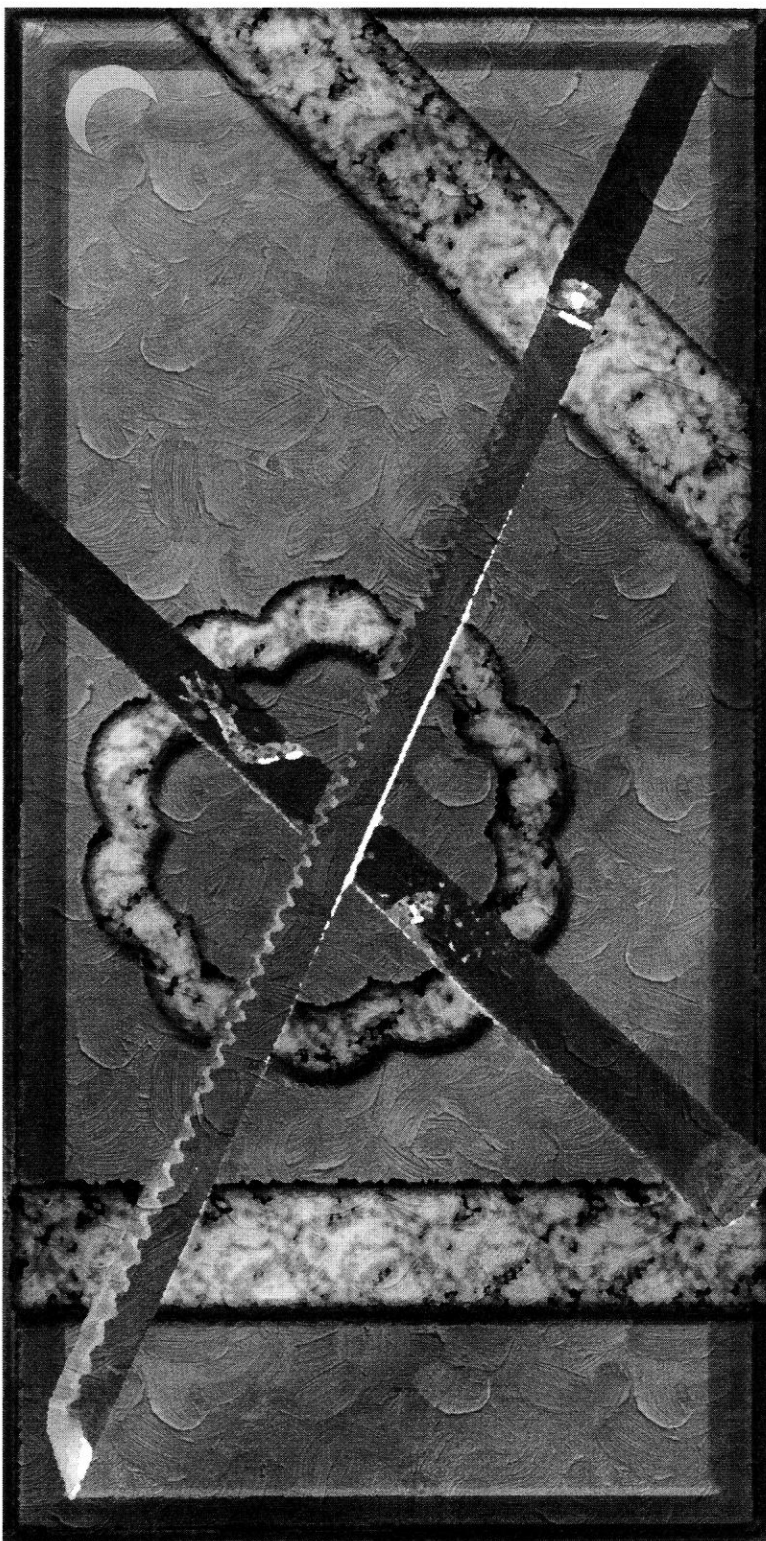
In the next year, the hero led his armies half as often. Death thought his pet hero deserved a little rest. In the next year, the king didn't fight at all, and death's sword hung on pegs above the king's bed. Wondering where he went wrong, death checked the hero's life-line, only to find it vastly changed. The visual image of the hero's future, depicted inside a crystal ball, was bloated and white for the rest of the hero's life. He was destined to never battle again, all because of the sword death had given him changed him greatly. Sighing, death took a generation off in holiday.

He visited the temples and holy places of his cousin gods who also dealt in death. It was in the temple of the war deity that death heard about enchanted battle swords that would take

over the minds of their wielders in times of war. This idea made the deity thoughtful. In the assassin deity's temple, death heard of a special enchanted dagger that completely took over the conscious mind of its assassin wielder to

make that person the perfect killing machine.

Death created an unusually powerful enchanted blade. The weapon was designed to take over the mind of whoever wielded it. Once its owner was controlled, the sword would actively seek battles and deadly situations. The weapon would turn the wielder into a hero who wanted only to fight. If the hero was slain, that wasn't a problem for the sword, as the next being to pick up the wondrous-looking blade would be enthralled by the magic of the weapon and start all over again. The weapon was made and placed on the prime material plane and was picked up by a giant of a fellow. This vile being promptly left the prime material plane for parts unknown in the outer planes, and death never saw his perfect sword again, since this death deity couldn't leave his plane of origin. Somewhere out in the multiverse, there was the perfect sword in the hands of the ultimate warrior, yet death couldn't watch his masterwork in action. That is why, to this day, all of the images of death show it with a frightening scowl in the hundreds of temples around the plane. That's also why the worshipers of death have taken to using strangling cords.



Anklesplitter, the Earth Sword

Dwarves have a very unusual sense of humor. One day, a young dwarf named Stonebiter was with his war band, battling a group of fire giants. Dodging around the feet of the giants, the dwarf was having terrible luck striking through the hard skin of the creatures. He also noticed that the toes of the giants really stank. In the course of the battle, one of his cousins managed to leap off a cliff onto the neck of a giant and chop away until he was flicked off.

Stonebiter thought this was really a nifty idea, and giant's necks must smell better than giant's feet. Also during the battle, fire giant greatswords continually chopped the life out of too many cousins of Stonebiter, and he often thought if they only had a bit more armor or enchantment, they might have avoided the swords cleaving them in half. Toward the end of the fight, cousin Earthbinder used a magical gem to summon a huge earth elemental, and that creature was able to help the dwarves finish off the giants. Looking over the field of battle, Stonebiter saw only his cousin Earthbinder left. All told, the giants had killed 28 of the dwarves, and the dwarves had killed the five giants. Both surviving dwarves shook their heads, not liking the ratio they were coming up with.

Stonebiter made his first dwarven warlist that day. It's a little known fact that dwarves make lists for everything. The list is to serve as a reminder for the dwarf of things he wants to own or equipment he wants to purchase. Stonebiter thought about the battle he'd just fought and wrote down the things that he felt he needed.

#1 I want a way to climb up a giant's body to reach his neck.

#2 I want a way never to smell

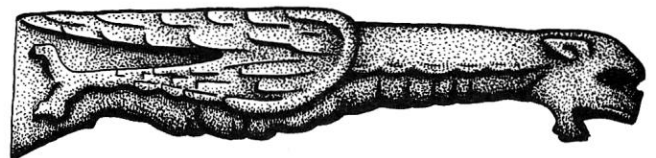
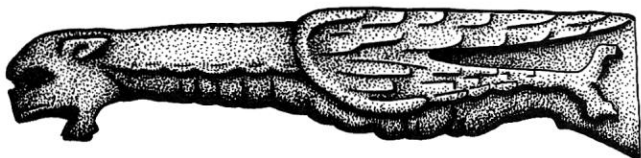
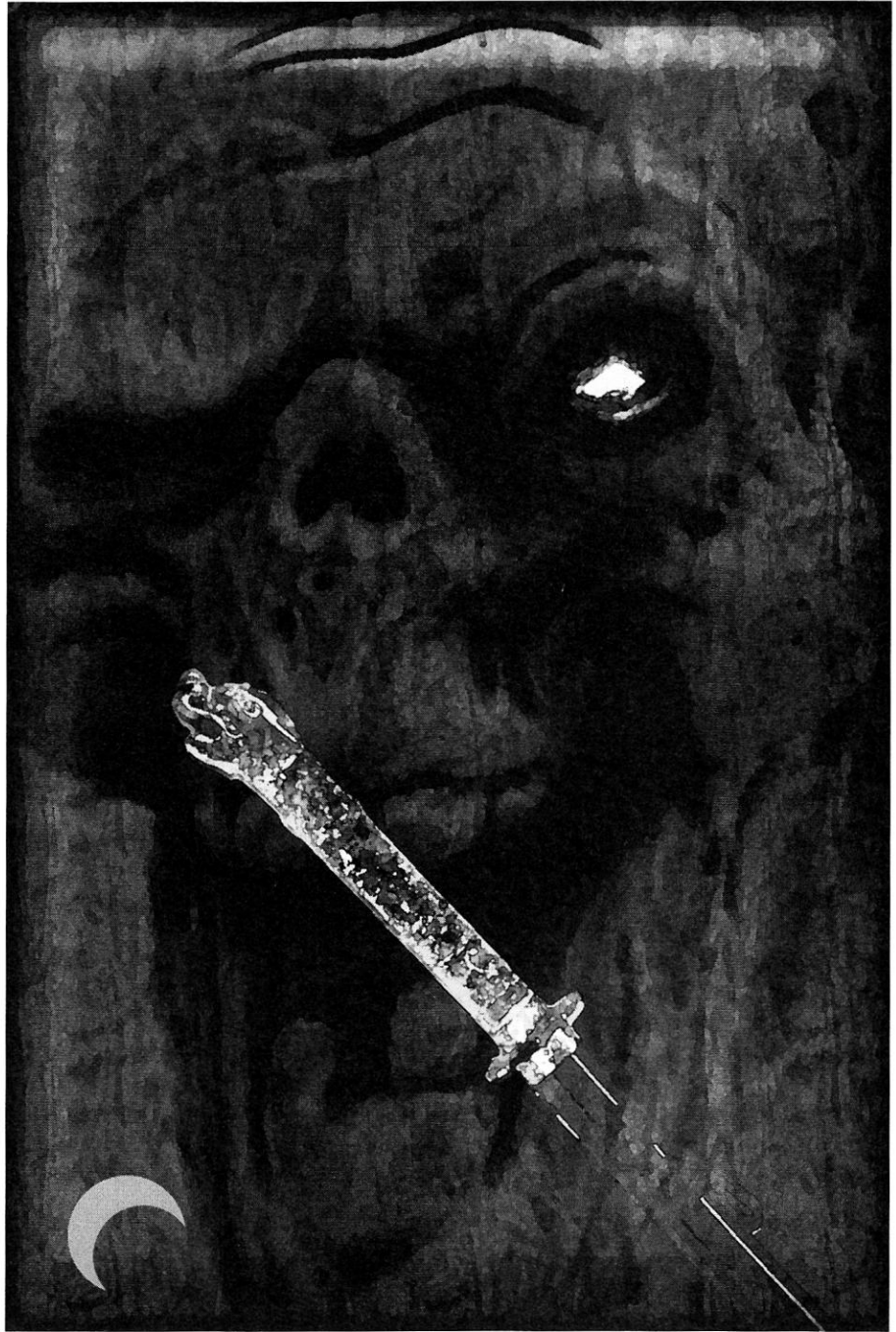
the stinky feet of a giant again.

#3 I want a way to do a lot of damage to a giant with each of my blows, and especially to fire giants.

#4 I want a way to be even more armored, over and above the fine armor my cousins make.

#5 It would be really nice to make some of the giants run, rather than have all of them stay and fight.

#6 I would like some good buddies like those fine earth elementals my cousin Earthbinder can summon to come and help me fight.



Stonebiter showed his list to his older cousins and especially the armorers and weaponsmiths of his clan. They all agreed it was a fine first list, but it would need a bit of questing to fill. For the next month, he wrote down all his cousins' advice, and some of it was a bit strange. He put on his best scale mail armor and borrowed a fine dwarven waraxe and started out to fill his list. He'd hoped it wouldn't take more than 10 or so years.

Talking with wizards was easy in the cities Stonebiter found in walking down from the mountains. He jotted down many useful notes about spells that would give him some of the effects he needed. Dealing with earth elementals proved to be a bit of a problem. Stonebiter discovered he needed to go to the elemental plane of earth to capture an elemental essence there. To do that, he had to learn how to travel the planes and survive in extremely hostile conditions. It was necessary for him to serve a few Aasimar and Tieflings to learn what he needed to know. After seven years, he traveled to the plane of earth and learned to talk to earth elementals. They were more than willing to help him out with some of their essence, but he had to do a favor for them. It seems the elemental plane of water was starting to impinge on the plane of earth, and the earth elementals didn't know what to do about it. Stonebiter's engineering skills came to the fore here, and he helped them design a spiraling cork screw of metal that moved tons of water, as the elementals took his simple design and made one a mile long and wide.

Reviewing his list, Stonebiter came back to the prime material plane. He had the spell effects he needed, he had the help of earth elementals, and he was able to make the magical sword he needed to apply all the magic to. The only thing left on his list was the element needed to make the weapon a sword of slaying fire giants. It also wasn't enough to just find some giant and carve out his heart. The dwarf had to take the essence from a superior fire giant, or the effect just wouldn't work.

Stonebiter started making a new list for the completion of his first list. He also took this list around to his cousins, who were all very glad to see him back in the ancient family catacombs.

#1 I could invade the mountains of the fire giants with a huge dwarven army. The toughest fire giants would come out to battle, and I could take one of their hearts for his essence. (Side note: I have no army. I do not control such an army. There isn't a dwarven army interested in doing this act for free.)

#2 I could pay an accomplished assassin to sneak into fire giant warrens, select a powerful giant, kill it, and bring its body parts back to me. (Side note: It's possible the assassin could bring back weaker body parts, because

they would be easier to kill and take. If this happened, my sword would not function properly, and I would have wasted most of his treasure hoard.)

#3 I could try trapping a fire giant and getting the essence that way. (Side note: There would be no guarantee that the giant's essence would be worth having.)

#4 I could try a lightning strike into the heartlands of the fire giants. Taking a few hardy dwarves, I could try ambushing a band of giants, taking essence that way. (Side note: I've tried imagining myself moving like lightning in this scale mail. The only way I could make it work is if I leap off a cliff and fall. Then I could imagine myself moving like lightning, but that isn't going to get essences.)

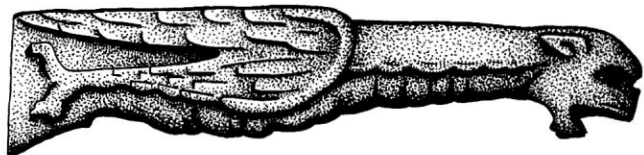
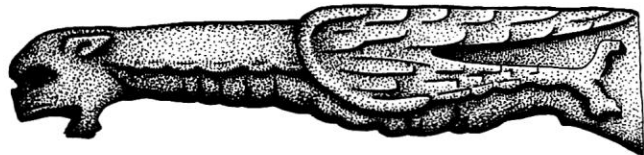
#5 I could try buying essence from the queen of the fire giants. (Side note: This was an excellent suggestion from my oldest cousin, Granitebiter. The old duffer told it to me while making war hammers. I liked the idea so much I have to try it.)

Stonebiter went among his cousins and the jewelers of the dwarven city and traded for the largest rubies he could get. It was common knowledge that fire giants loved rubies, and he was able to acquire some really excellent ones. Wearing the lightest and darkest armor, he went into the lands of the giants and found a large fire giant catacomb. In the middle of the night, he called out to the guards from the darkness. "Hey, I have rubies to trade, but I don't want to be killed in the trading." He threw a large ruby into the entrance of the giant home and watched from the darkness to see what would happen. The giants picked up the ruby and marveled at its quality. One of them took it into the cave, and minutes later a huge female in extremely gaudy clothes came running, shrieking, "Rubies! Rubies! I must have all of the rubies!"

Stonebiter recognized Helga the queen of the fire giants and knew he had just the person. "Cut off a big hunk of your hair and you will get three more like this one. Place the hair in your sack and throw it into the darkness. Then I will throw you the rubies. All you will be losing is your hair." The ruby the dwarf tossed out was head-sized and amazing.

The giant used her dagger to cut her hair. By now there were many giants at the portal peering into the night for the strange benefactor. The sack was tossed and Stonebiter pitched over three large rubies and rushed away into the night. The giants tried to track him using hellhounds, but he'd prepared his back trail well, and they didn't have a chance.

It took the dwarf two years to make his weapon, but when it was finished, he'd created one of the most famous dwarven blades on the prime material plane.



Steelshadow

From the fragmentary notes and journal of Methuen the Bald, found scattered for miles around Turhan Tower:

Having discovered all I can about the great wizard Turhan in the libraries and halls of the kingdom, I find I am still not satisfied. Many people are slaves to fear, refusing to even speak his name and burning any records of him. Even other wizards, whom I would expect to look past Turhan's so-called "atrocities" and see the great progress he made in pushing the limits of magical theory, have fallen prey to this superstitious fear and hate. With my own eyes, I have seen wizards destroy spells in their books after learning Turhan had created them. Don't these fools realize that pushing the boundaries of magical knowledge is worth the cost of a few lives, in the greater scheme of things? Regardless, I...[Fragment ends.]

[Fragment begins]...arrived at Turhan's Tower. I feel that the answers I seek can be found only within. As the tales describe, there is nothing living for miles in any direction, and a chill fills the air, causing my very soul to shudder. I have enough experience to recognize the residue of contact with the negative energy plane. It is as if the entire area has been exposed to negative energy at one point, which would certainly account for the deaths of the villagers Turhan is said to have killed. Perhaps an experiment went awry, or some creature from the negative plane attacked. Regardless, I find it difficult to believe that Turhan planned the destruction of the village.

As an experiment of my own, I tried casting a spell that channels negative energy to provide an effect much like the touch of a ghoul. The spell was super-energized, and casting it intensified the chill in my soul. The unusual potency of the spell was demonstrated when I used it on a summoned orc. Rather than merely paralyzing the creature, my touch slew it outright, draining it of life and leaving the poor beast a withered husk on the ground. My instincts seem correct—there appears to be some sort of linkage to the negative energy plane in this area. That would certainly account for the spiritual chill I feel and the inc...[Fragment ends.]

[Fragment begins]...spent a week studying the area surrounding Turhan's Tower and now feel ready to enter the building itself. Food and water last no longer than a day here, and the atmosphere prevents the rest and concentration I need to prepare spells, so I find myself teleporting back to town each evening to eat, rest, and study, then teleporting to the tower again each morning. The local folk don't like me, as they know where I go each day, but they are frightened and have thus far caused me no trou-

ble.

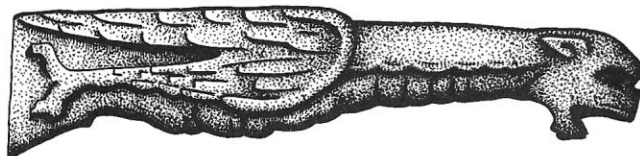
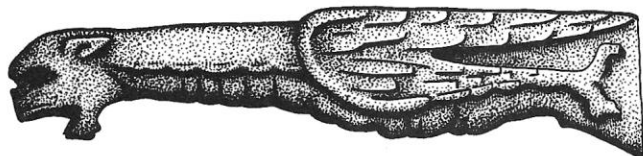
I see no obvious entrance to the tower, and minor magic has revealed no hidden ones. It may very well be that there is no physical door, a trick common to wizards who know passwall or phase door magics. Indeed, I suspect a permanent phase door is right in front of me, but no matter; even if I could see it, I can't use it. No, passwall will have to do for now. I hope to find Turhan's door information inside. Things wo... [Fragment ends.]

[Fragment begins.]...wer extends far deeper underground than it rises into the air. Just a cursory examination has revealed three floors up and seven down. The number of rooms here is really quite staggering, though of course I am carefully exploring each one before moving on. If my estimates are correct, I will have explored the tower fully in several months, though interpreting and understanding what I find may take an elf's lifetime or even longer. Even my most basic observations reveal that Turhan was a genius the like of which has not been seen since Dragus the Archmage. I am even more intrigued now to discover what happened to him—why he disappeared and where he went. Though he vanished two centuries ago, a wizard of his skill could easily slow the aging process—could he possibly still be alive, perhaps trapped in the lower reaches of the Tower?

Bah—merely hopeful speculation on my part. I must treat this as an investigation, not wander around acting like a hero-worshipping apprentice. My first stop will be Turhan's library—with any luck I will find his notes, and his blasted door commands. These constant passwalls are getting annoying! At least none of the customary guardian creatures seem to be active. Any living ones were probably killed by negative energy, and I don't think I've explored thoroughly enough to activate any constructs or the like. Those types of things were mainly used to protect individual rooms or treasures in Turhan's day, if I remember correctly. Nowadays, of cour...[Fragment ends.]

[Fragment begins.]...ng searching has revealed Turhan's most recent notes. They were hidden in a modified version of the secret chest spell—one drawer of a desk in the library is lined with magical force and enchanted so that anything put into it is made ethereal. Ingenious! I must admit I discovered it quite by accident, as I tried to use that drawer to hold my own notes and was horrified when they disappeared. A simple see invisibility spell revealed what had occurred, and Turhan's notes lying beneath my own.

The great wizard's notes seem to indicate that he was actually working on something quite innovative—a method of channeling negative energy by creating a focus



connected to both the material and negative energy planes. That would allow wizards to draw on negative energy much more safely and easily. This is indeed a great find! If it works, the study of negative energy could become commonplace and no longer something of interest only to loremasters and necrom...[Fragment ends.]

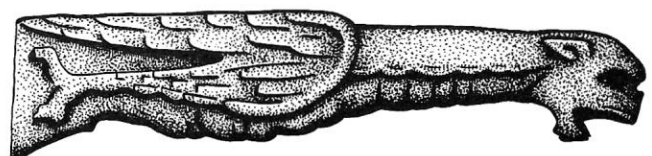
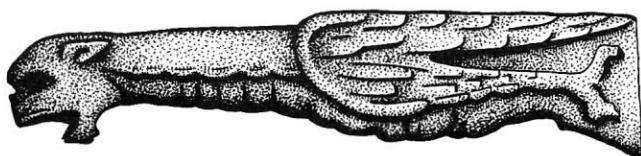
[Fragment begins.]...uous study of Turhan's notes on negative energy and am only beginning to fully understand them. Apparently, drawing the amounts of negative energy needed to make a focus useful on anything but a small scale proved to be impossible for a living being, as the energy simply destroyed that being. A mere object, however, lacked the will and knowledge required to properly control the energy channel. This seems to leave the undead as the only possible focus for the negative energy. The notes mention that Turhan created a focus he found acceptable and called it Steelshadow, though what that is rema...[Fragment ends.]

[Fragment begins.]...overed what the mysterious Steelshadow is, as well as what happened to Turhan. On the lowest level of the tower there is only one chamber, sealed with magic that has resisted all of my efforts to dispel it until today. Inside that chamber I found what, based upon his notes, must have been where Turhan performed what he thought was his perfected spell. The negative energy in the room is strong enough to weaken even me, and all that is inside, besides ancient components, is a wicked-looking short sword with a hilt shaped like some kind of beast. It seemed to pulse as it lay on the floor, and I realized — this was Steelshadow.

To my surprise, a hollow voice issued from the blade, asking who I was, and I realized that Turhan had created the perfect conduit for negative energy — an intelligent weapon, able to control the energy flow but not vulnerable to it. Steelshadow and I had quite a conversation, and it has explained to me that Turhan made a slight miscalculation that cost him his life. Turhan made no attempt to protect his life force, believing that Steelshadow would shield him from harm. But not even Steelshadow could prevent some negative energy from escaping when it linked to the negative energy plane, and Turhan's positive energy was snuffed out in an explosion that killed everything for miles. Positive meets negative is...[Fragment ends.]

[Fragment begins.]...ave discussed it with Steelshadow, and the weapons swears my life force will be safe during the spell if I hide it inside the blade. That way, there will be no explosion, I will live, and the recognition I seek will be mine — I will have done what even Turhan could not! I have agreed, and Steelshadow has helped me properly

prepare the spell and myself. Steelshadow and I will rul...[Fragment ends.]



Glimmerwing

One of the greatest and maddest wizards of the recent past was a human by the name of Pyke. Not simply an academican, Pyke spent over a decade adventuring with a group known as the Fireknots, before settling down in his tower to study magic and philosophy both. In addi-



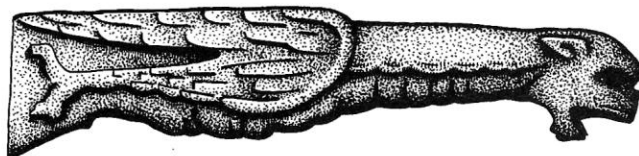
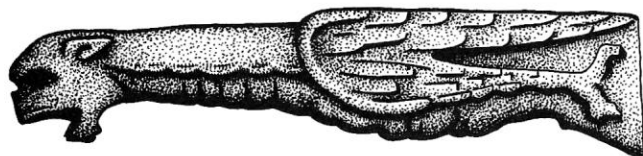
tion to being a skilled wizard, Pyke was interested by the interplay between the forces of good and evil, and he focused his considerable magical talents on investigating philosophies and ways of living. Scrying, truth spells, and constant questions asked of other-planar beings filled Pyke's days, until one day he received a visitor who changed the course of his life.

His guest was a female elf, haggard and poorly dressed, but with the glint of intelligence in her eyes. She introduced herself as Iana Genower and claimed to be a magician of small ability looking to learn more. She had heard legends of Pyke and had decided that he must be the one to teach her, even after she was threatened with exile by her people for choosing a human teacher over an elven one. When she defied them, they cast her out, declaring that if she ever returned she would be slain as if she were an uninvited member of another race. Thus, with little money but plenty of determination, the elf had traveled to Pyke's tower and now requested that he take her as an apprentice, as he did not currently have one, and indeed had never taken one.

Pyke was intrigued by Iana's story and forceful personality, and he agreed to allow the elf access to parts of his tower for a time so he could observe her and make his final decision. She readily agreed and quickly took up near-permanent residence in Pyke's library, even spending trance there from time to time. What drew the wizard's eye, however, was her choice of study material. Iana was devoted to the study of magic, that much was obvious, but she spent hours each day devouring philosophical texts as well. She was also quite a debater and had several long discussions with Pyke about the nature of the spirit and its role in a being's happiness. Clearly, she was a good match for Pyke, and he soon agreed to take the elf as his apprentice.

Years passed, and Iana grew in power, soon becoming a full-fledged wizard in her own right, with constantly growing skill. Yet she opted to remain with Pyke, for she had grown to both respect and admire him and his constant investigations into which was better—good or evil. Though at times nearly angelic and at others horrific, making him quite hard to live with, Iana's friend and master was a soul searching for truth, and this touched the philosopher in her. She secretly swore to stand by him, regardless of his actions or what he became, so long as that search remained foremost in his mind.

One day, several years later, Pyke awoke to an idea that he had heard mentioned but never taken seriously before. What if, he postulated, neither good nor evil is the path to follow, but instead a balance of



the two? What if a soul's true need is to walk the razor's edge between the two forces, including them both but embracing neither? The thought occupied his mind constantly for the next few days, and the more he thought about it, the more sensible it seemed. Balance was the key, he explained to Iana, that unlocked true happiness and contentment.

Once Pyke decided that balance was the way, his next obstacle became apparent. How would he know when his soul was in complete balance? The answer seemed just as obvious—a magical meter that would give him a visual representation of his soul's state of balance between good and evil. To create this mystical meter, Pyke took the weapons he had used while traveling with the Fireknights, an enchanted short sword and dagger, and prepared them for another enchantment. As the blades were magical in nature already, they were easy to prepare (thus their selection), and using spells of his own devising, the wizard linked the short sword to the portion of his spirit leaning towards good and the dagger to the more evil portion of his soul.

The weapons were placed hilt to hilt in a large globe of force which Pyke filled with aethyr, a liquid distillate of ethereal elements that was highly magically sensitive and potentially quite dangerous. The result was a barely visible globe as large as Pyke himself, seemingly empty but for the blades in the center—each with a unicorn-shaped pommel and quillions that extended out into a singular wing. The short sword, which Pyke had long ago named Glimmerwing, used gold in its construction, unlike the dagger Gloomwing, which used a darker brass. Within the sphere, the two blades touched hilt to hilt, forming a long needle for Pyke's spirit compass, and which blade was in ascension made it clear in what direction the balance of Pyke's soul had swung.

With this visual representation of his spirit's leanings, the wizard set about balancing his soul, to Iana's silent disapproval. If Glimmerwing was up, he did something completely evil; if Gloomwing was up, he did something entirely good, always trying to achieve a perfect balance of neutrality. His touch was simply not fine enough, however, for no matter what he did one blade or the other was always ascendant. Over time, the obsessed Pyke became quite frustrated, and he searched for other ways to find his balance. He studied ancient tomes, spoke to well-known magical innovators, and even visited clerics of several different gods, looking for answers. In each case, he was disappointed.

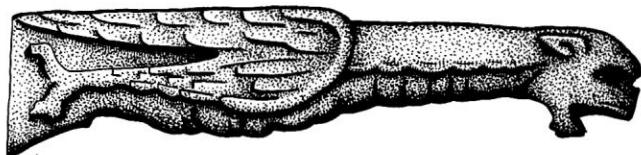
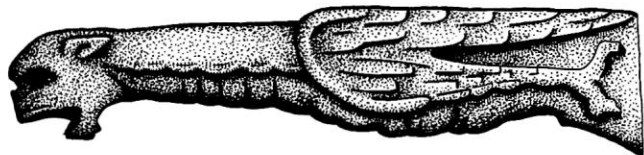
The crazed wizard eventually decided to try a variant

of spirit-binding magics, reasoning that if he took his own soul and forced the good and evil parts together so thoroughly that they could not separate themselves, balance would have to occur. After all, if good and evil mix so thoroughly that they become one, isn't equality assured? In his madness, he attempted to remake his own spirit's makeup, and this would have horrible consequences.

When Pyke performed his insane spell, the good and evil portions of his nature rebelled at being forced together and tried to flee his body. Normally, this would be impossible, but Pyke had already linked each part of his spirit to his sword and dagger, and they used those links to escape. This resulted in the wizard's spirit splitting in two, the good portion finding a new home in Glimmerwing and the evil doing likewise in Gloomwing. Pyke dropped soulless and comatose to the floor, and the surge of magical energy that accompanied the soul transfer caused the volatile aethyr to explode, throwing the two blades via the ethereal plane to areas unknown, and destroying much of the wizard's workroom.

Iana heard and felt the magical explosion and found Pyke's comatose body, and reading his notes and using divination magic she quickly discerned what had happened. She learned, as well, that the only way to restore her master was to touch his body with both blades simultaneously, destroying them and returning his whole spirit to him. Unfortunately, this was made more difficult in that the two blades were intelligent and had their own agenda, both good and evil desiring to be victorious in the battle for Pyke's spirit. They were mortal enemies, and only the touch of one could destroy the other, but this destruction went both ways. Either both blades lived, or neither did.

Losing no time, Iana magically put her master in a state of suspended animation and left to hunt down the two blades, hoping to restore the wizard. She asked no one for help, as she had been Pyke's only true friend and she feared other wizards would simply use him as a new curiosity to study. Many long years did she search, for their creation had also somehow rendered both blades invisible to divination, and finally Iana was able to find and claim Glimmerwing, which had fallen into the hands of a tribe of jungle barbarians who were worshipping it. Now, with the help of the short sword, she searches for Gloomwing, trying to remain free of Glimmerwing's powerful influence in the process. She is well aware that both blades will attempt to stop her from using them to restore her master, but she is too focused on finding both weapons to plan that far ahead.



The Sword of Sentax

To the immediate northeast of the continent Angladoria lay the four hundred islands that form the independent Principality of Ualatro. Ualatro is noteworthy for four things. First, it is the only nation that remains free from the Drxaxex Dominion, which for nearly a millennium has dominated the whole of Angladoria. Second, it is the last remaining outpost of human culture anywhere on Dor-eth, our world; an ageless culture which once held sway over the vast reaches of Angladoria, but which has been out-competed and driven far from its ancestral homelands by the Drxaxex, known to the Ualatri simply as "the spiders." Third, the lands of Ualatro have never once been touched by the Seaweb, the Drxaxex navy, which brings transformation and doom. Fourth, the Ualatri have been able to achieve the greater part of their success because of their control of a relatively small, simply decorated sword. This sword, called the Sword of Sentax, is thought to be the twin of the Sword of Sxstxax, once wielded by the Spider Queen and none other, but now thought destroyed. Its history is for another teller. Understand only that the two were paired and fated thus.

The Ualatri do not have any history that does not reflect their eternal conflict with the Drxaxex. Even the stories of their mythical origins reflect this. The Ualatri believe that the world was made by Sxstxax, the All-Spider, father of the Arachnidon, the eight holiest heroes of the Drxaxex. There were no humans whatsoever in the earliest times of Dor-eth, these stories tell. Rather, the spiders had dominion over the great forests of Sxstxax. And they lived this way for untold eons, until one of the Arachnidon, the renegade Sentax, after a perceived slight of his father Sxstxax, was banished from the forests. Finding nowhere else that was hospitable, he took up residence in the deepest grottoes of the tallest mountains of the world continent. And there, he grew lonely.

With years becoming decades becoming centuries becoming uncountable millennia to the great hero, his loneliness took on a god-like proportion. Abandoned, or so he thought, by his fellows, he became slowly aware of a latent power within himself—the power to create. His experiments went unnoticed for quite some time; he had no knowledge of the great war that had erupted between his brothers and their father, a war that would result in the death of the other seven Arachnidons. His earliest attempts at creation were, like most first tries, not quite right. It is believed that the troglodytes were his first work, followed shortly by the kobolds, orcs, and goblins. There was no goal he had in mind in particular, other than to find suitable worshippers, a people who could make real choices for themselves—who could offer Sentax

a reason for living.

It was his success, finally, which attracted the attention of his now outraged father. Sentax had created humanity from the four elements (in the other cases he hadn't gotten the balances quite right). Though strangely deformed physically (he was uncertain how a creature with just two legs and two eyes could reasonably function), these creatures had the most marvelous minds, and these he nurtured. He discovered that, when given the opportunity, they reproduced themselves in wondrous new ways—creating smaller versions of themselves, seemingly out of whole web. He was fascinated by this and took to leaving his mountains now and again, to see what his people were doing.

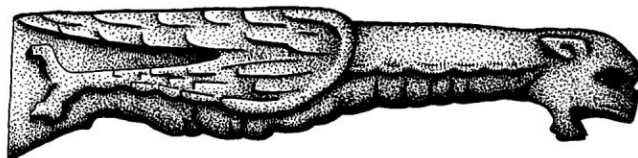
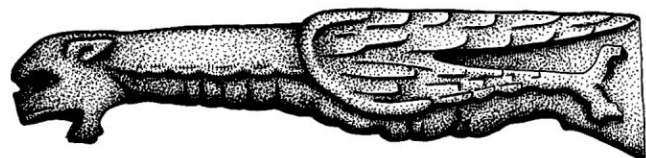
They were cutting down the trees, is what he observed.

Now why would they do that? he asked himself, before the scent of burning wood overwhelmed him. They were burning wood for heat, since they didn't have anything else to protect themselves. As the war of father and son raged on, quite unbeknownst to Sentax, his people, these humans, began to change, develop, and build whole societies. Since it became quickly clear that these humans would not offer worship to a creature that didn't look like them, he caused himself to be seen by some of his most ardent worshippers as a being like them—not quite human, though, more like a giant or a mighty titan. He rarely walked among them, finding their lack of proper limbs awkward, and at times disturbing. Still, despite this, he truly loved them.

It was then that the inevitable became real. Sxstxax the father, finally distracted (by his overwhelming victory) from his eons-long wars against his sons, learned that his last son had remade his creation IN HIS OWN IMAGE. The Ualatri, now numbering in the tens of millions, had spread far and wide on Angladoria, dividing into cities and countries and rapidly developing culture. All of them, however, shared the same god—Sentax.

It was thus that Sxstxax learned the limits of his powers. Nothing he could think of to do, and his intellect was prodigious, would effect the elimination of the Ualatri—their worship of his son somehow bound the father to leave them be. Fine, Sxstxax thought, I will not interfere in what you are doing. Myself.

And like the noble creator he was, he set himself a new task: to make people, like his son's, who would worship him. Being skillful, it took little time for him to set himself to the task and to be successful. All Sentax could do was make a flawed copy of himself. Sxstxax had made the real thing—a Spider Queen. A majestic creature, if ever there was one—one that could reproduce itself—by the ten-thousand fold. So in the Deep South, still essentially untrammelled by the humans, he set up his Queen, and he set her to work.



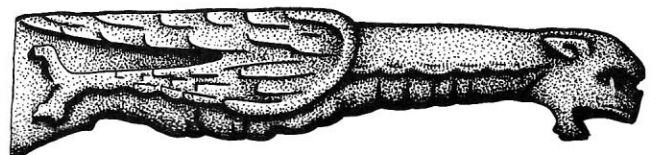
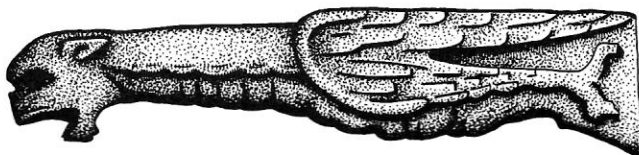


all non-spiders were wicked and must be destroyed. And so it went for centuries: human societies fanned out to the south and became more advanced. Spider society came inexorably northwards. The conflict, when it came, was surprisingly one-sided. As one human kingdom after another fell before the rapidly expanding and seemingly endless legions of the Spiderfolk, it became clear to the human priests what was happening—their god had abandoned them. It was said in the closest counsels of the priests that their god was once like the Spiders, and when Sntax heard this, he sent himself south to see what his father had made. In the deepest grove of the forest, he discovered the source of his people's problems. The Spider Queen had in her possession a wondrous sword, into which Sxstxax himself had given power. The son could not unmake it; nor could his people survive if the spiders continued their assault.

Like all inquisitive sons, though, Sntax was able to learn the craft of sword making. It was difficult, running counter to his natural impulses, but he was successful—until the very end. In giving to the sword his power, he made a critical mistake—and trapped himself in

In little time, they had created for themselves a society in the deepest forests and nurtured their core belief—that

the weapon. He remains there, powerless to get out, but helping his people even now.



Oisin's Bane

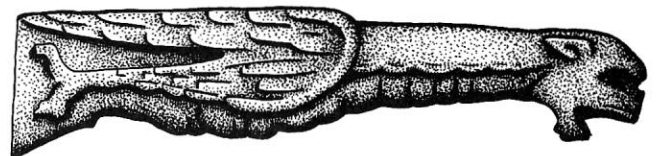
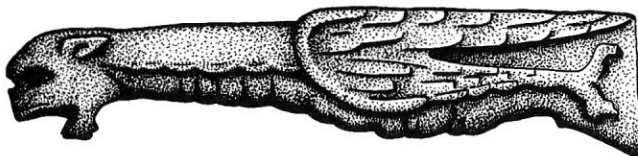
There is a saying common among the Dal and the Meklani—never let the Skelling of Arn tell you the story of their past. Besides the fact that it is a crime (and the

Sword Lord knows when you've broken the rules), the story is at once so tragic, and so deeply personal, that one cannot help but come away from its telling altered. In the hands of their master storytellers (even the least gifted Skelling storyteller can conjure images vivid enough to taste; the best, I have been told, have the ability to literal-

ly transport the hearers into the story itself), the compulsion to act is unsailable. None who hears can resist the very physical need to attack the Sword Lord's numerous agents (the Devil's Net, the eyes and ears of the Sword Lord, being the worst amongst them), his soldiers, and even, if possible, the Sword Lord himself.

Despite the prohibition on their storytelling, the Skelling of Arn are found regularly in the cities and villages of the Kingdom of Swords. They beg, mostly, and sell cheaply made handicrafts. They are not allowed to work the land, and wherever they congregate, they are assaulted, harassed, and menaced by the Devil's Net, whose words are like a slow fire—by the time you feel it burning, you're already lost. It is not the natural impulse of either the Dal or the Meklani to turn anyone away, and each time one of them turns his face from the oppression of the Skelling, they are made ever so slightly smaller, their hearts tightening. But what choice do they really have, I would ask?

I have heard the story of Oisin, and how he met his end, only once. It was some three score years ago, when I was in my



youth. My mother, who had a heart of gold, had been in town, attending to the sale of two cows and a dozen chickens to a merchant who, in his iterations, had made her acquaintance. The two found each other to be reasonable and rational, and hence had become excellent customers. My mother made it a point to go to town as infrequently as possible, because the Mayor, said to be a cousin or nephew to the Sword Lord himself, was particularly vicious to any Skelling who happened through town. And on the day in question, my mother witnessed the Devil's Net harassing a small family of Skelling, a woman with three children accompanied by an old man. All were dressed in rags and were thin; the youngest child was gray and splotchy—clearly ill-fed and sickly. They were not yet being beaten, but it was clear that they were mere moments away from that fate. As was typical when she was young, my mother hurriedly intervened on the behalf of the Skelling, and she brought them back with her when she returned home.

I am ashamed to say now that back then, I was embarrassed by this sort of behavior. There didn't exist a stray animal she wouldn't take in and nurse to health, or at least try. I had been repairing the barn when she returned home with those pale, sick, beleaguered people. She put me to work slicing vegetables and baking bread while she drew a hot bath for our guests. After some hours of work and many gallons of water, we were prepared to eat our evening meal. All of the Skelling seemed invigorated by washing up, even the youngest who, while still not very healthy-looking, was at least not colored the dingy gray of used washing water. We finished eating and cleaned up and sat by the fire.

Autumn in our village was often quite crisp, but that evening we kept the shutters open to allow the fresh breezes from the south to keep us aware. We had a healthy fire going. It crackled and hissed because our wood was still somewhat moist, but it was quite fragrant. It was then that the old man asked my mother if she might permit him, as a payment to her and me, to tell us a story. Ignoring my raised brow and doubting eyes, my mother said, "Go ahead. I'd love to hear your telling." And he spoke thus:

"More than seven decades have passed since I became a wanderer."

I didn't really feel anything until he said wanderer. At that moment, I could smell what I took to be burning

flesh, and I felt flushed—nearly on fire, I was so hot.

He continued: "Arn had been prosperous, rich, and foolish, as is often the way. We had lived so long in the shadows of our own power that we were incapable of seeing the threat posed to us by the Sword Lord."

The heat continued, but now, in my mind, I could see a gleaming shaft of light—it wasn't in a context, so I didn't know what it was, but I did see it.

"Though I never met our King, like all Skelling, I knew his heart. I could sense his presence, his warm benevolence. It is one of my oldest memories. There had never been a time without him. Oisín was his name; it means 'bringer of righteousness' in Arnish. He and his family had ruled uninterrupted for forty generations. Each one of them unique, none repeating. But Oisín, like his father before him, had seemed at times to take his kingship for granted. We could feel a weakening of his resolve—his spirit. We needed him to be stronger than ever, but he wasn't.

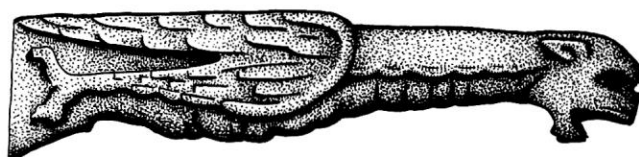
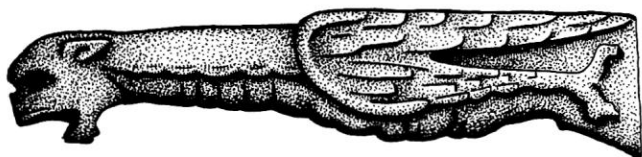
"At first the orc and goblin armies of the Sword Lord were merely raiders harrying our borders and looting our shipping. We thought little of them. Oisín thought even less about them. Then the raiding became more frequent, and humans were seen with the orcs and the goblins. The King's Council viewed this development with gravity, but the king didn't. I don't know why this is. Anyone should have been able to see the signs.

"Then the Sword Lord came. His host was mighty—the largest ever seen in Arn. Our men were weak from years of poor training and weak discipline. The collapse of Arn was very quick. When neither the Dal nor the Meklani answered our appeals for help, we thought our cause was lost. But then the King, our Oisín, shared with us a truth about his family. None of them could be killed by weapons. The Sword Lord's troops were at the gates of our ancient capital when Oisín went out to meet him, with his Palace Guard.

"It was devastating how quickly the end came. Within ninety seconds of Oisín's penetration of the Sword Lord's lines, he struck our King with his blade, so simple looking, but so deadly. There isn't a Skelling alive who can escape the knowledge that Oisín died for us."

"And we did nothing to help you," I whispered. The old man turned to me, taking a crust of bread from a plate near the fire.

"You'll do what you can," he said.



Katana of the Ancient Executioner

"Listen, children, to the tale of two sisters, Yakima and Shira. Few bonds are stronger than the bonds between sisters, but for this pair, the bond was tighter than any. The girls were born on the same day exactly one year apart, so they grew up almost as twins, sharing their games, their toys, and their bed.

"Yakima and Shira played together in the mountains, inventing their own games and climbing trees. They walked to school together and shared their daily chores. Those who knew them well felt that they must be able to hear each other's thoughts, too, for often they laughed without saying a word, or shared a task as if silently speaking.

"When the girls were in their mid-teens, a strange man stopped them on their way home from school. He had a long white beard and black eyes. His face was pinched as if made from hard clay. He told the girls that they possessed a secret power and that he could help them learn to use it. He said that the energy in the bond between them could be shaped and controlled to produce wondrous results. And he told the girls he would charge them nothing to teach them—he only asked that the sisters cook a meal for him now and then.

"Yakima, the older of the pair, wanted nothing to do with the man. Shira was uncertain, but her sister convinced her to pass him by. The next day, they discovered the man in the same place on their way home, and he reminded the girls of his offer. Yakima again pressed her sister to ignore him. But Shira could not get the stranger out of her mind.

"The man appeared on the girls' path now and then, offering to teach them in exchange for only a little cooking. The stranger frightened Yakima and she always hurried past him, dragging Shira with her.

"Then one day, when Yakima was home ill, the man stopped Shira on her way from school. He convinced her to visit his cottage and learn more about what he could teach her. He promised she would not be harmed and would return safely to her sister.

"The cottage was not far, but the path was so overgrown that Shira could barely make her way. But the stranger passed among the vines and brambles easily, as if the plants opened a way for him.

"Upon reaching the cottage, Shira was dumbstruck. She had expected a simple house with a straw roof and a cooking fire in the center. But what she saw was an expansive home built of cedar with a fine tiled roof. Chickens clucked in a nearby pen and several goats munched tough grass. Spread before the home was a

wondrous garden with blooming roses, fragrant herbs, and a pair of cherry trees.

"The man motioned Shira to come inside. He served tea and showed the girl a few tricks of magic, such as producing a flame from the tip of his finger and turning the feathers on his chickens to blue. Shira was astonished and instantly agreed to become his student.

"For the next several months, Shira sneaked off to the man's home at every chance. He seemed to know when she was coming, for he always met her on the path and guided her through the brambles. Yakima was upset about her sister's behavior and strongly suspected that Shira was visiting the old stranger, but was never able to catch her. Then one cold night, Shira disappeared without a trace.

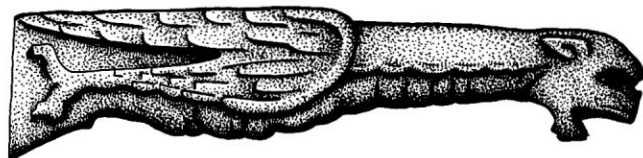
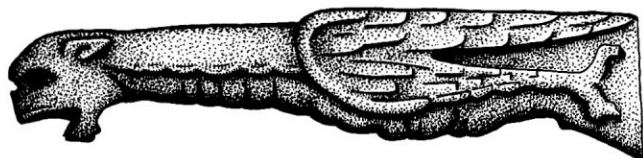
"My children, you cannot imagine the pain that Yakima suffered. She missed her sister terribly and knew not whether she was alive or dead. For an entire year, Yakima searched the mountains for her sister, listening for her with her heart as well as her ears.

"The girls' birthday came and still Shira was missing. Yakima walked their path to school over and over that day, hoping to find some clue of her sister. Finally, just as dusk settled in, Yakima thought she heard weeping. She fought through vines and briars to follow the sound, but the plants seemed to entangle her. Yakima yanked at the plants and forced her way through them to stumble on a clearing revealing a fine cedar house with a tile roof. Yakima was certain she could hear her sister crying and she ran to find her.

"Inside the barn, locked in a stall built for a horse, lay the weeping Shira. Yakima roused her sister and the pair eagerly clasped hands though the spaces in the stall. Shira pointed out the key for the lock and Yakima opened it quickly. Shira explained that the man had left early that morning but she feared that he would return soon. Yakima begged her to explain what had happened for the past year.

"Shira told the sad tale of herself and two other girls. The man had lured the three of them to his home and taught them how to cast a few spells. He also taught them the tricks of thieves, and ordered them to steal the katana of the ancient court executioner. Since the emperor no longer used executioners, this ancient sword lay in a museum in the same city as the girls' school. The stranger told them the blade had severed over one hundred heads, and he would kill the girls' families if they did not obey him.

"Many months after their capture, the girls succeeded in stealing the blade. When they returned, the stranger locked the three of them in stalls in the barn, treating them no better than animals. They believed he was performing some bizarre ritual with the sword, for they often



smelled bitter incense and heard him chanting. One day, he came for one of the girls and took her to a chopping block, where he cut off her head in sight of the other two. Then he placed her severed head back on her shoulders and cast a strange spell, lighting incense, which coiled around her.

"After a few minutes, the girl arose, dead, but not dead. She became the man's silent servant and was taken back to the house. Shira and her friend saw the poor girl many times, performing endless exhausting tasks for him. Then, a month later, they saw him burying the girl near a stand of birch trees.

"The next day, the horrid stranger came for Shira's friend. He chopped off her head and cast the same spell, and she arose to become his servant. This had been nearly a month ago, and Shira was terrified that she would be killed soon.

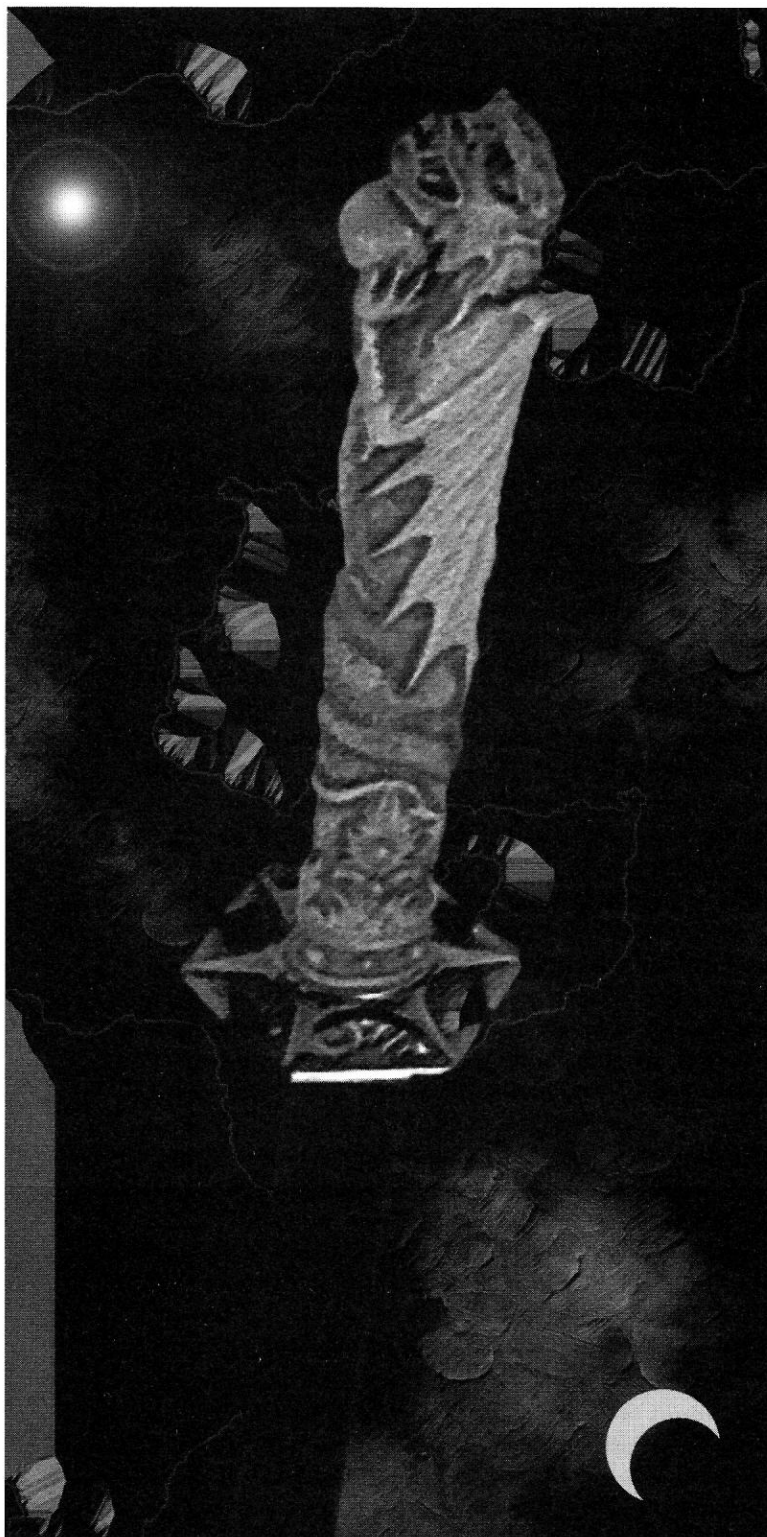
"Yakima told her sister that they must steal the sword and hide it. They could not allow the man to corrupt more girls. They sneaked into the house and found the blade, then prepared to flee.

"Just as they stepped outside, however, the stranger returned. He burned with fury that Yakima had found his home and that Shira was about to escape. When he saw the katana in Shira's hands, his eyes blazed and he began to cast a spell. The sisters rushed at him in the same instant, Yakima diving for his knees and Shira swinging the katana wildly.

"Shira's aim was true, my children, and the man's head dropped from his body and rolled on the ground. At that instant, the fine cedar home with the tile roof vanished as if it were a vapor. The chickens and goats and barn crumbled as if made of dust. All that stood in the clearing was a run-down shack with a leaky roof. The girls stared at each other, horrified. Then they held each other tightly, knowing that they were safe.

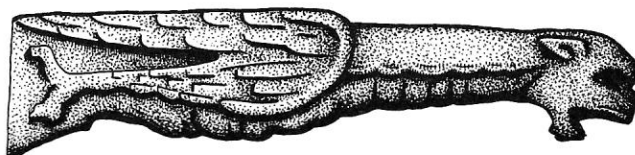
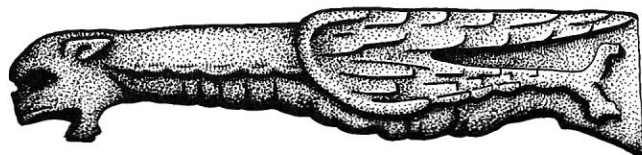
"Yakima and Shira buried the man's body at the edge of the clearing. They placed his head in a sack and dropped it down a dry well. They wrapped the sword in rags and carried it to the deepest ravine they knew, to a precipice that dropped off into thick forest in a valley two thousand yards below. This ravine was so steep that the girls' grandfather said that no human had ever set foot at the bottom. Yakima and Shira hurled the blade off the edge, watching it tumble end over end and finally disappearing into the dark green far below.

"The sisters returned home and celebrated Shira's return with their parents. And they told this tale over and over so that other children might know to stay away from



strangers.

"How did I come to hear this tale? I have heard it told every year at the birthday celebration of my Grandmother Shira and her sister, Yakima."



Blade of Dark Pain

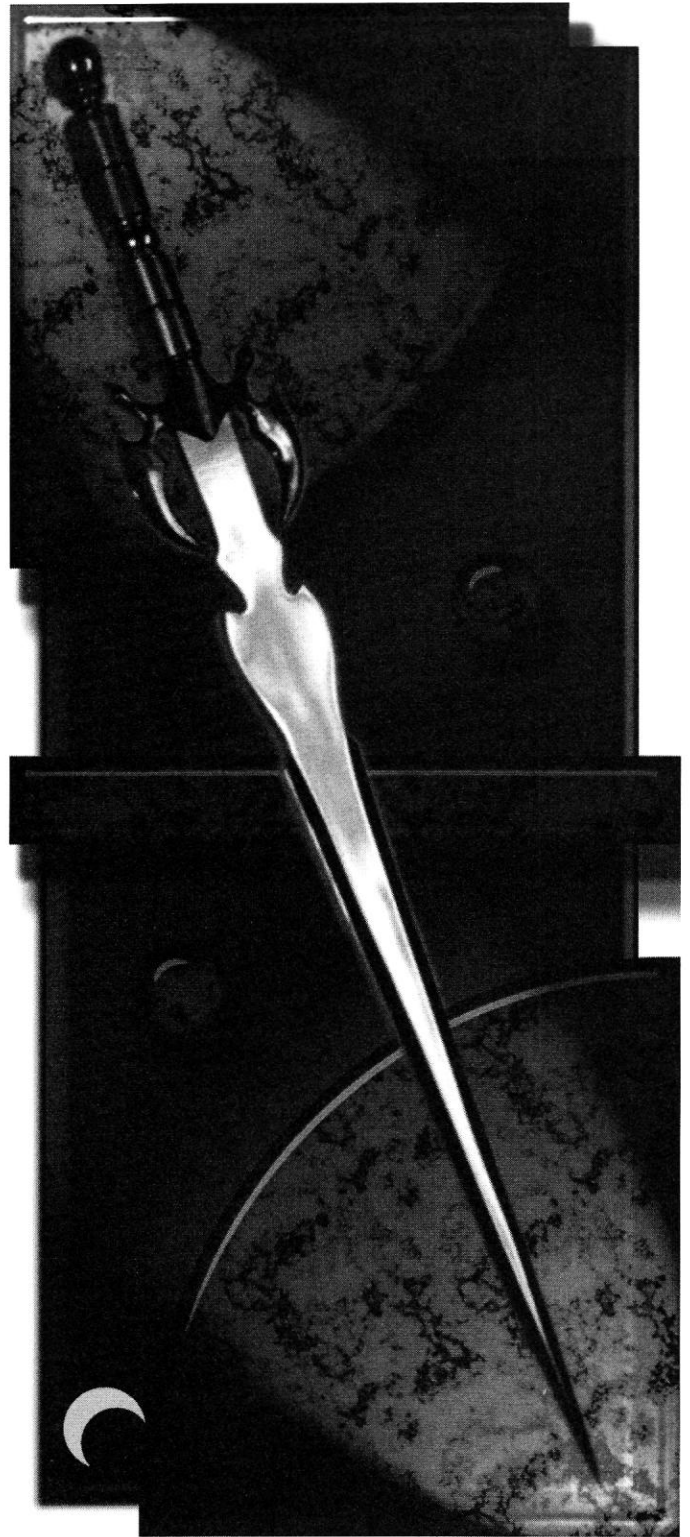
The Kohlling Mountains, a harsh range of steep peaks, deep ravines, and perpetual snows, are said to conceal a thousand secrets. Their rugged slopes hide the tales of travelers lost in bad weather, of merchants succumbed to wild animals or bandits, of hermits tucked away in caves or tiny valleys protected from the winter winds. Most of all, the Kohlling Mountains shield a kingdom of dwarves from the outside world, from meddling traders, and from nosy visitors enamored of the "cute, little people." The Kohlling Mountains have been refuge for this dwarven kingdom for over ten thousand years.

Within the mountains, the dwarves have carved out their entire existence: homes, shops, forges, temples, schools, and even farms. The kingdom is tidy and efficient. It has space to expand as the population grows, never suffers from the effects of weather, and experiences little illness or disease since foreigners never enter. The dwarves are safe and isolated, and they like it this way.

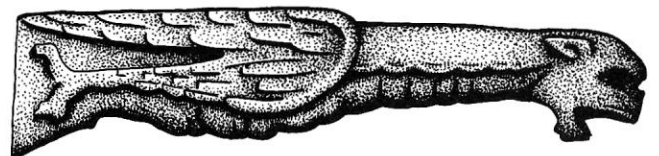
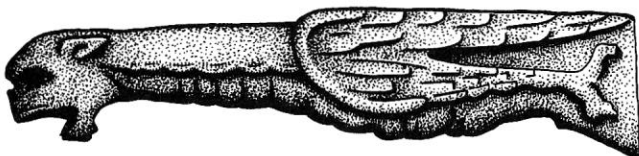
The dwarves' lives were not always so secure. In the thousands of years that the dwarves have lived in the Kohlling Mountains, they have created traps and switchbacks, dead ends and rock falls, and various other means understood only by the dwarves to safeguard their stronghold. Roughly five thousand years ago, the dwarves were assaulted within their own mountain by a bloodthirsty troupe of orogs. Unaccustomed to combat, the dwarves suffered great losses before scattering the orogs into dozens of tunnels, many of them dead ends, and slaying the intruders one by one. The dwarves suffered double the casualties of the orogs, but won the day and immediately set about repairing their kingdom. They soon discovered that three dwarves, Buklo, Mesdin, and Ulchin, were missing.

The dwarves quickly dissolved into search parties and spread out through the mountains. Within their own tunnels, the search was rapid and within hours, all parties had reported back with no sign of the missing dwarves. They could only assume that the missing three had been kidnapped by the orogs.

The dwarves held a High Council meeting that night to discuss the attack, their missing brothers, and the actions they should take. Some felt that following the orogs to rescue the missing dwarves would simply be suicide and might invite another attack. But the majority felt that they could not abandon their brethren. A rescue party of fifteen dwarves was organized, and the troupe set out a few hours later. Discovering the path the orogs had taken and following their filthy scent, even nearly a day after their retreat, was no difficult task. Eventually, the rescuers exited the mountains and discovered an orog encampment.



The orogs occupied a rocky valley with a number of natural caves in one of the steep mountainsides. From appearances, they had lived here for twenty years or more. Rocks were arranged like crude furniture, areas



seemed to be designated for cooking, eating, and sleeping, and of course, the entire place was strewn with garbage. But there was no sign of the missing dwarves.

Under cover of darkness, the search party slipped into the orogs' caves to find their missing brothers. Chained together at the back of one small cave was the missing trio. One unfortunate dwarf, Mesdin, was already dead.

But the search party itself was doomed. A mangy dog kept by the orogs barked at the intruders, attracting the attention of the reveling orogs and forcing the dwarves into combat. Within moments, the search party was dead, but the two prisoners were spared. The orogs had already determined their plans for the remaining pair. The loss of fifteen more dwarves ended any more thoughts of rescue attempts by the dwarven stronghold.

Somehow, the orogs had discovered that their dwarf captives were smiths, and determined to force the pair into forging weapons and armor for them. Since the dwarves' only choice was to cooperate or die, they reluctantly instructed the orogs in the building of a forge, and drew pictures of the tools they needed. Buklo and Ulchin were put to work immediately with the tools and materials available, and within weeks, orogs returned to the camp with new tools and iron.

At first, the dwarves fashioned knives, shields, and breastplates for the orogs. And as long as they cooperated, the orogs fed their prisoners well. Disobedience, they quickly learned, was a painful proposition.

Years passed in this fashion. Buklo and Ulchin regularly spoke of escape, but they were kept under guard day and night. Luckily, they were not mistreated, for the orogs fully realized the value of their presence. But the dwarves' existence grew more foul with passing days—the stench of the camp, the terrible meals, and the orogs' offensive taste in weapons and armor. Finally, the two dwarves hit upon a plan for their escape.

Buklo and Ulchin had learned to speak the orogs' language over the years, and one night, as the orogs hovered around a campfire, the two dwarves began to tell a tale of dwarven heroism and victory. The tale centered on a fictional dwarf leader with a shining silver sword who led his troops to victory in the face of impossible odds. The sword, so the tale went, rallied the troops, slew scores of enemy fighters, and protected its king from harm. The dwarves' victory was complete, thanks to their wondrous king and his miraculous blade.

As hoped, the story attracted the attention of the orogs' leader. The next day, he summoned the dwarves and communicated his desire for a blade like the one in their amazing tale. The dwarves appeared flustered, scratched their beards, and conferred earnestly with each other in the presence of the orog leader. Finally, they instructed the orog to draw in the dirt with a stick, and show them

his vision of his ideal weapon. They explained the tools and materials they would need, and within a month, the pair was hard at work forging the orog chief's fantastic weapon.

Of course, Buklo and Ulchin had a plan. They intended to forge the sword desired by the orog, but through the centuries of techniques passed on to them by other dwarves, they planned to create a sword that would guarantee the demise of the orog chief and a large number of his followers.

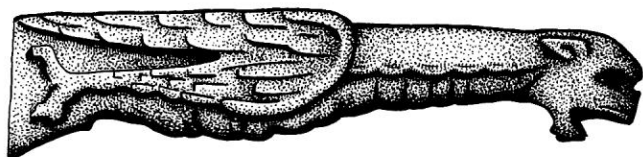
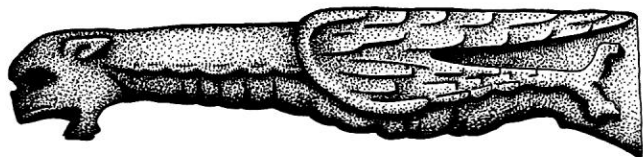
Buklo and Ulchin immediately began work on the sword. They tempered the metals, folded the blade repeatedly, and set themselves to creating one of the finest weapons they had ever forged. But they included a new ingredient in the production of this blade. Buried at the back of their cave, forgotten by the orogs, lay the body of Mesdin, their captured fellow. The pair dug up his bones, ground them to powder, and hammered them into every aspect of the weapon: blade, hilt, pommel, and quillions. After two months, their masterpiece was finished; Buklo and Ulchin presented the weapon to the orog chief.

The chieftain and his tribe were struck dumb by the sight of the sword. Never before had they seen such a wonder. The chief brandished it, demonstrating its perfect balance and agility. Buklo and Ulchin smiled secret smiles of revulsion; they considered the blade grotesque and impractical, but had rendered it according to the chief's instructions.

The chief immediately organized a raiding party for that evening. In the meantime, he sparred with his best warriors and tested the blade, admiring its style and apparent perfection.

The midnight hour drew near, and as the chief and his warriors mounted horses to begin their raid, the bloodlust in them swelled. The chieftain raised his new sword to signal his warriors to battle, but instead of following him down the mountainside, they brutally attacked and killed him before he could even turn his mount in defense. One of the warriors grabbed for the sword, but was struck instantly by half a dozen blows and was dead before his body could fall to the ground. In the chaos that followed, nearly three-quarters of the orog warriors were killed. Buklo and Ulchin had escaped even before the chieftain fell from his horse, and morning had dawned before any of the orogs noticed them missing.

As dawn broke over the valley, about thirty warriors remained of the former tribe. Many were dead; three were missing. And the blade, that miraculous treasure so coveted by the chief, was also missing. Those who remained had no desire to follow their missing comrades and retrieve the sword; better to let the sword deal its own fate to those who betrayed the tribe.



Sword of the Mayamori Islands

Folktales are filled with tales of fantastic treasures, monstrous beasts, and stunning heroes. But of all the treasures described in such tales, perhaps no hoard is as famous or incredible as that belonging to the Sultan of the Mayamori Islands.

While most folk believe the tale of the sultan to be merely myth, few realize that the sultan, his kingdom, and his legendary hoard are real. The Mayamori Islands are so small and remote that few have heard of them. Seafaring ships do not pass near the island; only the sultan's own fleet embarks on journeys to and from the islands. This state of semi-myth has served to protect the islands for centuries; were the kingdom thought to be real, pirates would surely raid the precious cargoes that depart the islands.

Mayamori's greatest treasures are its climate, its soil, and its exotic plant life. On this island alone, strange and wondrous plants are grown as spices and ingredients for wizards' elixirs. The proceeds from a few pounds of snikken berries, a single sack of eukarra pods, or a large flask of limpril oil are enough to allow half a dozen families to live comfortably for an entire year. The Mayamori Islands are thus wealthy beyond comprehension and exist safely in anonymity.

While idyllic, the islands cannot claim to be free of all difficulties. Bad weather, an occasional hurricane, or squabbles between noble families all bring their share of problems. Perhaps the most notable of the islands' disasters was the loss of Sultan Ratichi about two hundred years ago in a powerful hurricane.

Sultan Ratichi had just completed a state visit to a distant land and was returning home aboard his fantastic sailing ship, Silver Porpoise, when a hurricane bore down on the ship only a few miles from the continent. The storm bore down too quickly to evade, and the ship, its crew, its treasures, and the ruler himself were lost.

The coins and jewels that were scattered to the ocean floor were of little concern to the royal family, but the loss of the sultan's personal sword brought great disappointment to the entire island. Ratichi always carried a slender blade given to him by his grandfather. While his grandfather was sultan, he began the Festival of Harvesting every year by cutting a blossom, a strip of bark, or a cluster of berries with this ceremonial weapon. When Ratichi became sultan, he continued this tradition, always using his grandfather's sword in order to bring good luck to the islands. The blade had been used in this fashion for nearly three-quarters of a century, and now it was lost somewhere beneath the ocean's waves.

To the citizens of Mayamori, the sultan's sword was an essential part of the Festival of Harvesting and a good luck charm. But the sultans themselves knew the true value of the sword they called Vindnu-ar. The blade had been enchanted centuries earlier and was a most effective instrument of scrying. While holding the sword, the wielder could concentrate on any site on the islands and observe anything happening in that place. The sultans used it to observe their servants, spy on nobles, and learn important details about those they mistrusted. Persons who were watched through the use of the sword had no idea that they were being observed.

Unbeknownst to the sultans, the properties of the sword were affected by many years of exposure to the island's exotic oils and spices. The blade had gained abilities that escaped the notice of the rulers. But now the sword was adrift in a wooden chest, floating away from the wreckage of the Silver Porpoise and toward a new destiny.

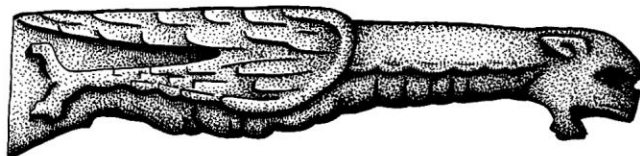
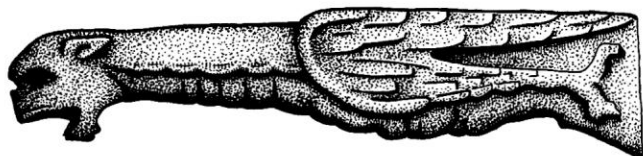
Some months after the wreck, the chest washed up on a sandy beach and was discovered by a simple fisherman named Plelk. After opening the chest, Plelk could hardly believe his eyes. Within the chest lay a sack of gold coins, several pieces of jewelry, and the sultan's sword. The man's prayers had been answered, for his brother was about to be sold as a slave for failing to pay a debt. Plelk lugged the chest home, decided to ransom his brother with the sword, and set out to pay his brother's debt. On his journey, he marveled at the rich, exotic fragrance that emanated from the sword.

The landowner who held Plelk's brother was surprised to see him. But as much as he tried, he could not hide his greed at the sight of the sword. The landowner drove a hard bargain, but eventually forgave the debt and set Plelk's brother free in exchange for the sword.

Although rich, the landowner was a crude, crass man and began to use the slender blade as an eating utensil. The rich fragrance of spices and blossoms always surrounded the sword, but for some reason, the blade made the landowner's food taste terrible. He quickly tired of the sword and gave it as a gift to his nephew.

The landowner's nephew, Munnin, was a despicable boy. He taunted other children, teased the family pets, and tortured the family's livestock. One look at the sword made the boy drool. What mayhem he could wreak with such a wondrous blade!

Munnin's first order of business was to carve his name in the nearest tree, the family ox cart, and the wall of his bedroom. Then he captured a goat and tied it securely, intending to scratch his name in the goat's hide with his new blade. But when he picked up the sword, the hilt burned his hand severely. Cursing, he dropped the sword but tried again. Each and every time he tried to use the



sword over the next several days, his skin was painfully burned. Munnin abandoned the sword in the goat pen, where his sister Lita retrieved it the following day.

Lita admired the sword greatly, so she cleaned and polished it with care. That night, she slept with the sword under her pillow and dreamed fantastic dreams of the Island of Mayamori. Each night, she dreamed of the island—warm breezes, gentle waves, and exotic flowers and birds. But soon her dreams were filled with unusual faces, with conversations in a strange language, and with images that frightened her. When she slept without the sword, peaceful sleep returned. But the blade frightened her enough that she asked her father to be rid of it.

Lita's father sold the blade to a traveling merchant. Hundreds of miles away, the merchant traded it for a cartload of richly woven rugs. The rug merchant traded the blade for a pair of camels, and the camel herder gave the sword as a gift on the occasion of his good friend and neighbor's birthday.

The new owner, a wealthy man with six daughters and a single son, had one great desire in life—to be blessed with more sons. He and his wife had followed many kinds of advice in conceiving their children, but had succeeded in bearing only a single son. They had heard of a wizard in the mountains who was said to be capable of anything, for a price, so they set out to consult with the wizened old woman. After a difficult journey, they found

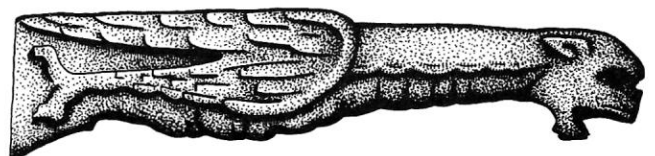
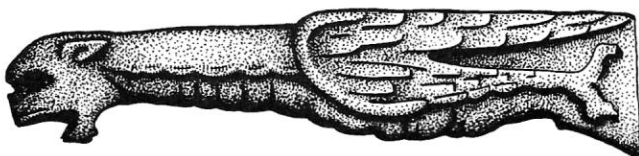
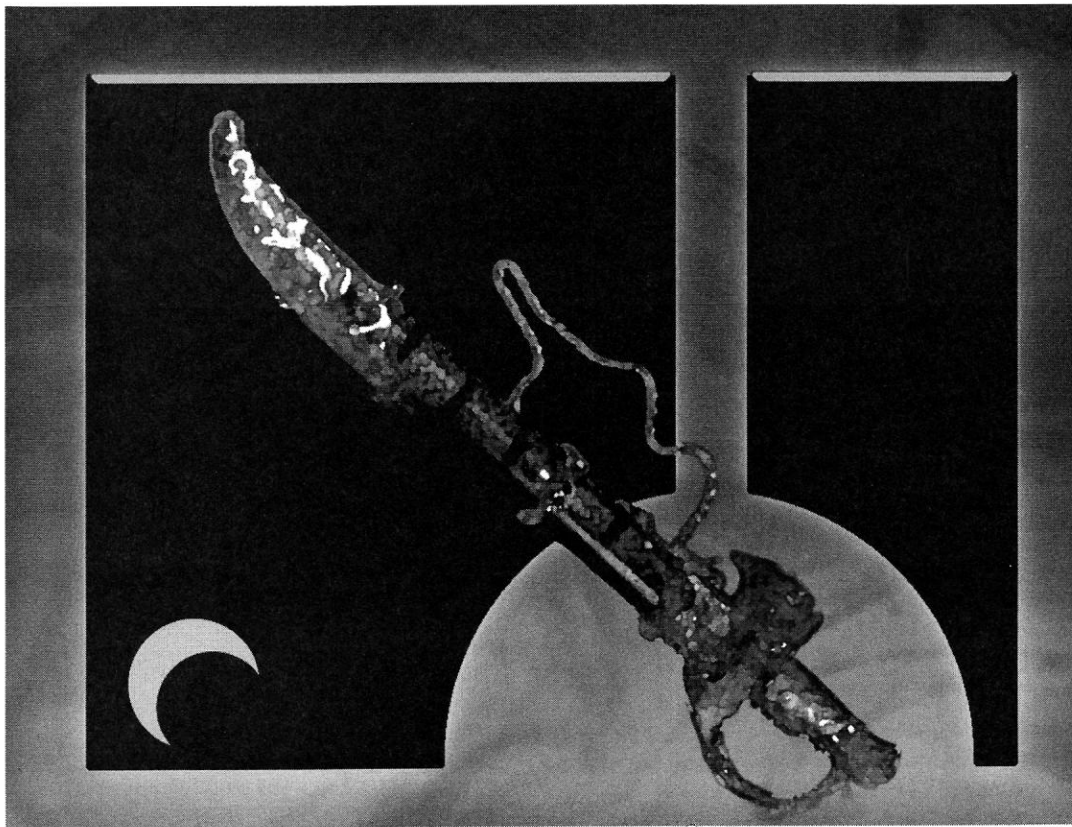
the woman's home built into the rock of the mountain.

The ancient wizard listened attentively to the couple's story, but she could not keep her eyes off the sword that hung from the man's belt. When they had finished, she closed her eyes and concentrated for a long time. The couple thought she had fallen asleep, but as soon as they moved an inch, her gray eyes popped wide open. Finally, she asked to examine the blade.

The mage held the sword gently for a few moments and she inhaled its rich fragrance. A smile crept across her face. "I can help you," she croaked. "But I must purchase expensive herbs and seeds. Let me trade this weapon for what I need." She negotiated a fee with the couple, then sent them away, promising to return when she had acquired the ingredients she needed.

Several months later, the old wizard appeared at the home of the couple. She was tanned from a long ocean voyage and dressed in colorful, billowing silks. Three rings of gold sparkled on her fingers. She told the couple she would prepare them to conceive a son. First, she instructed them to anoint each other with limpril oil. Then she brewed a tea from snikken berries and other herbs. The ritual continued long into the night, and nine months later the couple was blessed with a son.

On the islands of Mayamori, a year of celebration was in full swing, for the sultan's favorite sword had found its way home.



Wizard's Salvation

One of the many dangers that wizards encounter is melee combat. Because practitioners of magic spend so much time studying or in the laboratory, they simply have little time to pursue the arts of fighting. Most wizards learn to fight only with a staff or dagger, and their practice with wooden daggers to avoid injury does not always translate to proficient use with a real blade.

Faced with this problem, an ingenious headmistress named Elemanri at a famous wizards' school hit upon the idea of enchanting a dagger so its injuries would heal immediately. Even practicing with a blunt blade is not as good as practicing with a sharpened one, so the wizard joined with some local clerics to produce the ideal practice weapon. They worked for many months creating a new form of magic, and found a number of applications for this idea in the process ranging from kitchen knives to farm tools.

Eventually, Elemanri and her consultants produced a set of six blades, all of which healed the minor cuts and jabs they caused in practice. Elemanri and her wizards felt that the slight pain inflicted by such cuts was a good part of the lesson, so the blades were not designed to function without causing pain. The daggers that resulted behaved as real daggers in practice combat, and their slices caused pain as normal daggers, but the wounds from them healed without a trace in a matter of a few minutes. The wizards at Elemanri's school thought them brilliant, and they were put to vigorous use immediately.

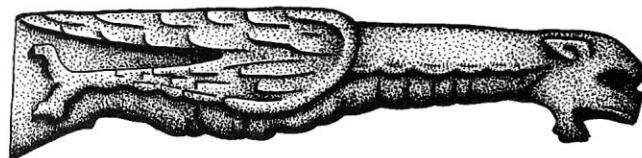
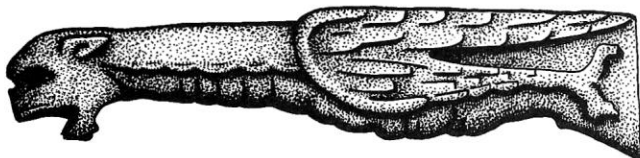
The idea of such weapons quickly caught on at other schools of wizardry. Before long, many young wizards benefited from Elemanri's clever invention.

And before long, a certain young wizard called Lymmis saw a way to use this wonderful invention for evil purposes. When she had finished her studies at her local school of wizardry, she stole one of the daggers and disappeared without a trace.

Lymmis had been an above average student of magic—smart, but lazy. She saw a way to use her stolen dagger to quickly build a fortune and live comfort-

ably. She first made her home in a remote forest and began experimenting with the dagger. After stealing a number of magical tomes and potions, she finally corrupted the dagger to function as she wished. The wizard then embarked on a plan to lure wealthy men, murder them, and steal their riches to make her fortune.

Lymmis used a number of disguises, spells, and tactics to befriend or seduce wealthy men. Once she got them into bed, she proposed a game of punishments and rewards. The punishments involved a cut from the dagger—which Lymmis demonstrated on herself. Once her victims saw how the wounds quickly healed, they were



astonished. Some of them consented to her little game. The others simply fell prey to a speedy slash to the throat.

What Lymmis had accomplished in her magical research was to allow slight wounds from the dagger to heal quickly and completely. Mortal wounds, however, did not heal until the victim was all but dead. Just as the last breath escaped a victim, his wounds healed as if they had never occurred. Using various spells such as transmute water to dust, Lymmis cleaned up the blood from her strikes and left her victim behind, taking his money and valuables with her. When such victims were discovered, they were fully clothed but missing their possessions, and no sign of a wound could be found. They were bloodless, of course, which caused great confusion among law enforcement as to what could have caused such death, and more often than not cast the blame toward vampires or fiends.

Lymmis pursued this charade for many years, traveling far and wide to prevent causing a pattern to her murders. Eventually, she built a villa outside a great city and claimed to build a phenomenal wizard's laboratory alongside it. The villa was richly furnished and appointed, with every luxury Lymmis could imagine. But the tower that she said comprised her laboratory stood empty. Not a single workbench, sheaf of parchment, or potion bottle lay within. Lymmis inflated her reputation at every chance, convincing all who knew her that she was a powerful wizard who had gained a great fortune. She also made it known that she traveled frequently, accounting for curious questions about her comings and goings. And to anyone who listened, she always made sure to mention the numerous deadly traps that protected her property.

The wizard's home was actually poorly protected, for Lymmis had practiced her art little since perfecting the dagger. She had barely managed to increase her power in order to learn more difficult spells. Those who had attended school with her had long ago surpassed her abilities in many ways.

But Lymmis continued her game of seduction and murder as long as it suited her. She had no trouble luring men, even with advancing age, because spells and disguises allowed her to appear young and beautiful. And she never tired of thieving, for she always found one more bauble that delighted her, or one more treasure that she wished to buy with the money she stole. Lymmis played her game carefully, never visiting the same town twice, and never visiting towns near wizards' schools.

Eventually, Lymmis's game was bound to catch up with her. A wizard who had attended a school using similar daggers took notice of an unusual murder in his hometown. The victim was drained of blood and without visible injury. After consulting with his fellows and some

instructors at his school, all agreed that such an injury could be caused by one of the enchanted practice daggers. After contacting a number of schools, the group learned that one institution had lost a dagger to theft, at the time of a student's departure.

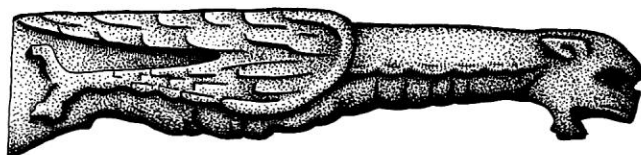
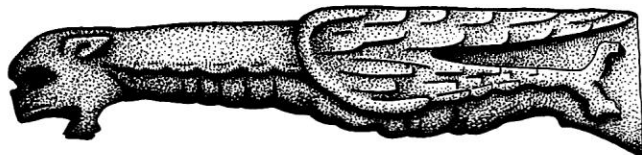
Curiosity took hold of the wizards. Could the thief have killed this bloodless victim? Through many investigations, they learned of four similar murders scattered across their continent, then set out to search for more. With the efficiency of magical communications, Lymmis's former school soon discovered a total of thirty-seven similar cases. If these were caused by their former student, she needed to be stopped. Even if their former student did not cause the murders, the perpetrator needed to be caught.

Lymmis's former teachers spent years following reports of similar murders in an effort to find her. But she was always careful about covering her tracks, and always altered her disguises so as not to arouse suspicion.

But Lymmis's luck could not hold out forever. One spring night, in search of her next victim, the wizard spied a wealthy man about her own age. She engaged him in conversation and the pair took a late night stroll in the balmy breezes of spring. Eventually, the couple found their way to the man's bedchamber. Several hours later, Lymmis proposed her game of rewards and punishments. When the time came to kill her victim, though, Lymmis could not bring herself to strike the killing blow. She had suddenly grown fond of this stranger, and even her extreme greed could not bring her to kill him. She held off her strike in order to think the situation over.

The man Lymmis had lured was a clever merchant with an eye for opportunity. He recognized the value in the dagger this woman showed him, and decided to explore ways to profit from its attributes. He spoke with a number of wizards and clerics, describing tools, knives, and scissors that could be enchanted with such magic. And as fate always demands, word of his inquiries reached a group of wizards trying to track the person who had committed so many murders with the stolen dagger. In a matter of days, Lymmis was under surveillance by the wizards and the merchant was convinced to assist them in bringing her to justice.

Under the watchful eye of several wizards, the merchant proposed the game of reward and punishment to Lymmis. This time, he was unkind and abusive to her in order to incite her wrath. The game proceeded, and this time, just as Lymmis was about to slash the man's throat, her former comrades stormed the room and rescued the merchant. Lymmis found her way to a prison cell within the walls of her former school, with the dagger she had corrupted hanging in the corridor outside her door, as a reminder of her evil deeds.



The Zombie Blade

History

At the height of his power, the necromancer Ruu'nas created an army of undead that would be a match for the military of the largest of kingdoms. Hordes upon hordes of animated dead were under his command, everything from skeletons to zombies and other lower forms of undead. Others such as ghouls, ghouls, ghosts, and the like possessed too much free will to be useful in battle. Hence, the wicked necromancer preferred mindless undead, those that would obey his commands without question. With an army of these undead at his command, he could expand his power and rule the land with an iron fist.

However, man for man Ruu'nas knew that an animated corpse is no match for a veteran soldier. While the dead of the enemy did nothing but swell his army's ranks, the necromancer could never seem to gain enough of an advantage to expand his dark ambitions. That was over a hundred years ago, and what history does not know is that Ruu'nas may have been successful in his conquests were it not for an item of his own creation - a sword that would one day be known as the zombie blade. There is no written record of a zombie blade in any magical text, let alone the process of creating one. Ruu'nas was a powerful mage of the dead, and like many potent spellcasters he did not share his secrets with others. Years later, many would thank the gods that Ruu'nas was greedy with his secrets, for if more zombie blades were created and found death would likely reign supreme.

The name of the weaponsmith who actually forged the first zombie blade has been lost over time, but the important fact was that it was empowered by Ruu'nas at the height of his magical prowess. The purpose of empowering the blade was to create a magical weapon that would work only in the hands of a zombie, augmenting the undead's unearthly power. It would also provide protection against the forces of good, making it more than a match for even the most formidable combatant. It was Ruu'nas' hope to mass-produce such a blade for his undead army, giving him an advantage in future conflicts. In fact, he was able to create several of the blades before falling victim to his own creation. It is unknown how many of the swords Ruu'nas empowered before he was slain, but what is known is that in the hands of a zombie these mystical weapons are powerful indeed.

In creating a zombie blade, Ruu'nas needed to sacrifice the life of a warrior of some skill. This imparted the blade with the expertise of the victim, which would in turn be conveyed to the undead wielder - or so Ruu'nas thought. Within a week of handing one of the swords to a zombie,

the necromancer was dead. Mere days after placing a zombie blade in the hands of an animated corpse, the undead began to exhibit increased strength, agility, and seemed to become more aware of its surroundings. So confident was he in his creation and magic, Ruu'nas allowed a zombie armed with one of his blades to guard him as he slept. One day he did not awake, a casualty of his own demented enchantment.

Zombie Warrior

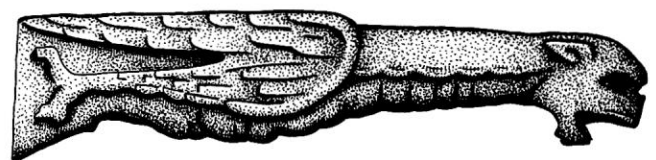
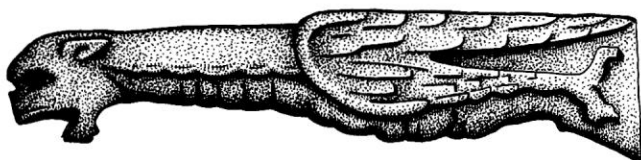
The power of the zombie blade lies in its magically enhancing its undead wielder. The longer the blade remains in the possession of a zombie, the more powerful the undead becomes. This was plainly evident in regards to the corpse who slew Ruu'nas, a creature who would later become known as the Zombie Warrior.

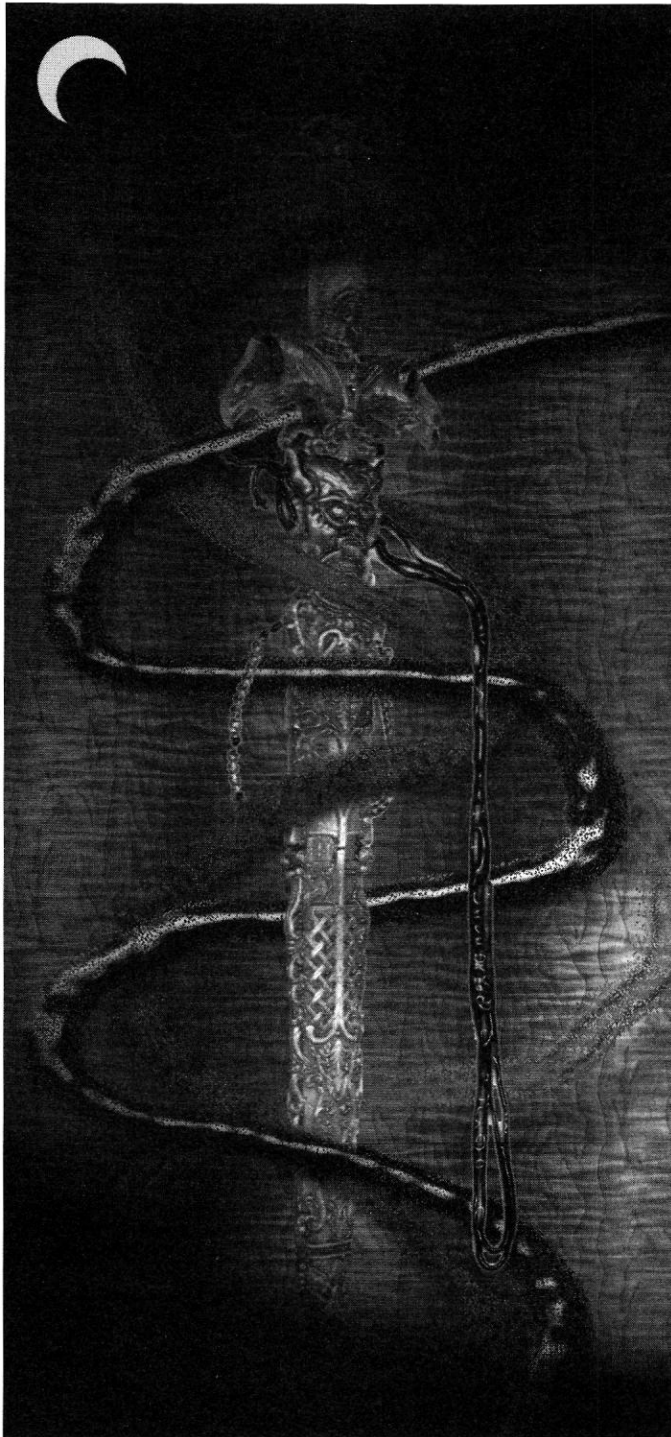
An unforeseen side-effect of the necromancer's magic, combined with the life force of a captive soldier, the zombie who had slain his master had eventually become a free-willed undead (such as a vampire or lich) capable of its own designs. Once the creature understood what had happened to it, he quickly hid the remaining zombie blades so none could become what he now was. As time passed the blade bestowed more powers and abilities to the zombie, and soon gave him control over Ruu'nas' undead forces. With great power came great ambition, and it wasn't long before the aspirations of the creature rivaled that of its dead master. Within a few months an undead army was released upon the countryside, with the Zombie Warrior at its head.

Using the blade's power to its fullest, the Zombie Warrior swelled the ranks of his army much faster than Ruu'nas could with memorized spells. The undead horde quickly overwhelmed every hamlet, village, and town unfortunate enough to stand in its path. Soon larger cities and military forces began to take notice, and quickly mobilized against this new foe. With a thousand zombies at his command, the Zombie Warrior's forces were sorely tested against the combined martial forces of three nearby kingdoms. In the end, a single rogue defeated the entire army by taking the battle directly to its leader.

Sneaking behind the front lines of the undead soldiers, a rogue named Rodann confronted the Zombie Warrior face to face. Following the orders of high-level wizards from the defending kingdoms, the rogue's orders were simple: find some way to disarm the Zombie Warrior. Through use of divination and other mystical means, it was discovered that the Zombie Warrior gained his power from the sword that never left his hand.

Separating the sword from its master was a gamble, but circumstances left them little choice. In the end Rodann was successful, and the entire army under the control of the Zombie Warrior fell lifeless to the ground. However,





in true rogue fashion Rodann disappeared afterwards without a trace, and the zombie blade with him. To this day a standing reward is offered by many kingdoms for any zombie blades discovered.

Sword's Creation

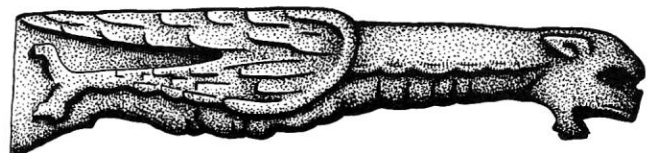
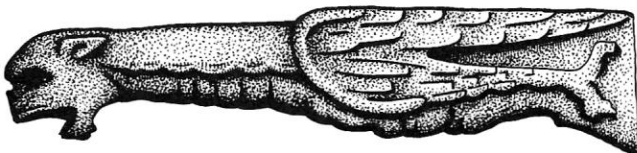
Zombies themselves are corpses reanimated through dark and sinister magic. Normally they're mindless husks who shamle about doing the bidding of their master. However, an animated corpse with the zombie blade in its hands is a different type of undead. Zombie Warriors are zombies who have possessed a zombie blade for some period of time. Over the course of time a zombie possessing this weapon gains many powers: increased strength, combat prowess, as well as an ability to animate the dead.

It is unknown if the mind of a Zombie Warrior is that of its former life. If so, it is an evil and twisted version with an unearthly determination to eliminate all living beings that stand in its path. Though only one Zombie Warrior is known to have been in existence, the inability to locate one (or more) zombie blades is a concern to those who know of its powers.

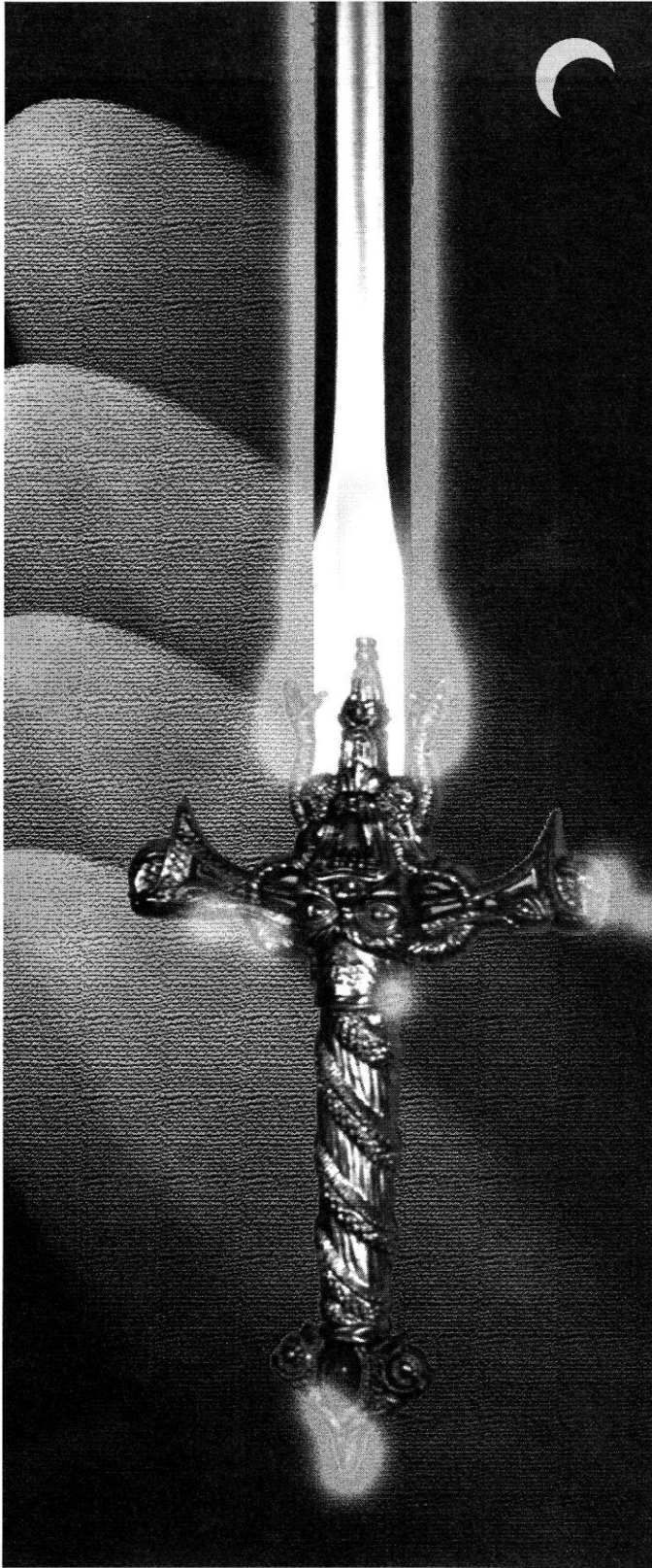
It is also not known how many zombie blades the necromancer Ruu'nas created, but it is thought the number does not exceed a dozen. In the hands of anyone other than an animated corpse, the zombie blade is powerless. Once grasped by a zombie it becomes a powerful weapon the creature will refuse to relinquish even to its creator. For every five days a zombie retains possession of the weapon, its power increases. Once the creature has reached its full potential, its first actions typically involve slaying its creator, or other living humanoids in the area.

The corpse draws all its power from the negative energy of the zombie blade. If the blade is ever separated from its host, the wielder crumples dead to the ground. A zombie blade also does not function for other intelligent undead, though does for other variations of animated dead.

History regarding the zombie blades and how they function is not fully known to the magical community, mostly because none have ever been closely studied. It's for this reason many necromancers and other collectors of rare artifacts have sought them for years. Ruu'nas was a necromancer of considerable skill, and never did he take any apprentices or share any of his secrets with the magical community. It is for this reason that many seek out his work, specifically the zombie blades, to learn how he created them. Little do they know that should they put the sword in the hands of a zombie it could bring about their death. It is rumored that some necromancers of lesser skill once tried to duplicated the power of these rare swords, and for one reason or another failed. Some even perished under mysterious circumstances, lending credence to the rumor that the shade of Ruu'nas guards the secret of the zombie blade. Were more of these weapons to create zombie warriors, the world may one day become a land of zombies and nothing living would survive.



Elf-Tongue

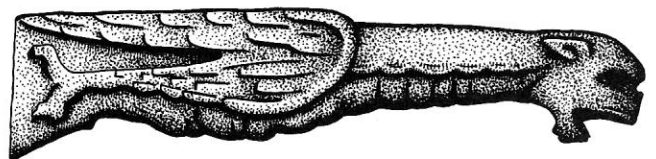
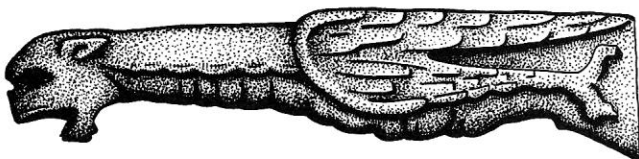


Thore Ironrock was a dwarven weaponsmith of extraordinary skill. From the day of his first apprenticeship until the day he died there were few in the world who could match his skill. Jewelry, arms, and armor of masterwork quality - there was nothing the dwarf could not create given the time and materials. For the first 100 years of his life Thore crafted items for a price far beyond that of conventional smiths, and he never had a shortage of commissioned work before him. He was an expert in crafting jewelry and other trinkets, armor and shields, as well as full suits of plate and other items of metal. His specialty, however, was swords. For each sword he crafted, Thore put his heart and soul into the forge that created the blade. To some it may have seemed strange, but many said that Thore Ironrock was only truly happy when he was covered in smoke and soot, holding a new crafted sword before him. He felt that each sword was an extension of his spirit and the strength of the dwarven race. This all changed with the death of his only child.

Braun Ironrock-son was not a craftsman like his father. Larger and stronger than most dwarves, Braun had the aptitude of a warrior instead of a craftsman. Being an understanding father Thore encouraged his son to do what he wished, and Braun quickly moved through the ranks of the dwarven military. Then on a routine guard mission to a nearby elven kingdom, Braun and his company were ambushed by a contingent of elven warriors. The elves were not part of any military force conscripted by the elven king, but a group of brash younglings looking for trouble. They stumbled upon Braun's troupe as he was escorting a dwarven ambassador to discuss trade negotiations. Surprised and out of their element, the dwarves were easy targets for the silent bows of the impetuous elves. The ambush was quick and thorough, resulting in the death of Braun and all the unfortunates under his command.

Bitter over the demise of his son at the hands of an elf, the focus of Thore's craft drastically changed to one of creating items of war. Abandoning all other pursuits, Thore spent the next decade crafting weapons to aid his race in the confrontation against the treacherous elves. He produced hundreds of masterwork weapons over the years, some of which unfortunately ended up in the hands of his elven enemies. When Thore learned of this he devised a new sword to be wielded in the war, one which was harmful to elves but gave all others power against them. He called this type of blade the elf-tongue.

A long and slender blade, the dwarven smith created the elf-tongues to use in the crusade against the elves. Even after hostilities had ceased between the two nations, Thore's bitterness over the death of his son drove him to keep producing the weapons. While easily used by dwarves, the blades' size and weight also made them



attractive to larger humanoids—including elves. This was intentional on Thore's part, but should an elf take possession of an elf-tongue it would eventually result in an early death. The angry father worked day and night until extreme age caused his hands to no longer hold a hammer, all for his hatred of the elven race.

To those who knew him before the war with the elves, Thore Ironrock was a kind and gentle soul who loved his craft. After the death of his son he became madly obsessed with revenge upon the elves as a race, and not just the individual kingdom responsible for Braun's death. Even half-elves were not safe from his vengeance. It wasn't until years after the war had ended that anyone fully realized the power that Thore crafted into every elf-tongue blade.

Each elf-tongue, and there were initially thought to be about 200 of the blades fashioned, were dedicated to slaying any with elven blood. The power of the sword, born, of Thore's hatred, slowly twists the mind of the wielder against the elves as a race. At first the possessor gains a slight disdain for any elf he or she encounters. In time the loathing grows more and more prominent, until the owner of an elf-tongue attacks any elf he encounters on-sight for no apparent reason other than to bring about their death. This effect worked on all races, not just the dwarves for which the swords were crafted.

Should an elf-tongue fall into the hands of someone with elven blood in their veins, the effects of the sword's enchantment is somewhat different. At first the elf will embrace the ownership of such a finely crafted weapon. Then, depending upon the elf's strength of will, the sword will somehow bring about their death. This death could take the form of suicide, plunging into battle against overwhelming odds, or some other gruesome end depending upon the circumstances of where the victim succumbs to the malevolent sword's influence.

When used during the war, these swords would cause dwarves to charge blindly into battle against elves they despised with all their soul. Being such finely crafted weapons they were often looted from the bodies of dead dwarven warriors by their enemies the elves, who in turn met with some ghastly outcome later on. The casualties would be attributed to the war, with none suspecting the true nature of the weapons. When this magic was discovered years later, it was believed the enchantments of these weapons likely prolonged the war many years—and caused thousands of needless deaths to a variety of races.

By the time the rulers of the land—dwarf, elf, and human alike—learned the true nature of these swords and confronted Thore, he was extremely elderly and near death. The sovereign of the dwarven nation pleaded with the master smith to aid them in destroying all the elf-tongue blades, the response they received was the crack-

ling laugh of an unforgiving father. Still bitter over his son's death nearly three centuries earlier, Thore told them he had made hundreds upon hundreds of elf-tongue blades—many more than they had suspected.

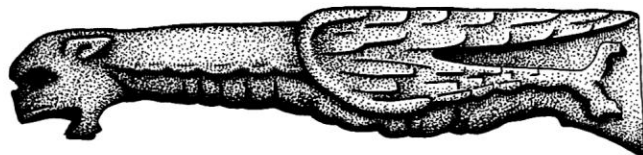
Some of the weapons looked alike, but in the later years, Thore had crafted them differently so that if his secret had ever been discovered all of the swords would not easily be found. A short time later Thore Ironrock died, but not before spitting one more curse on the elven race for the death of his only child.

Many years have passed since the death of the weapon-smith Thore Ironrock, but the legacy of his swords unforgivingly lives on. While hundreds of elf-tongue blades have been recovered and destroyed over the years, many more lie secluded or undiscovered. Since only the most powerful magic is able to discern if a blade is secretly an elf-tongue, most wielders never even discover the true potential of their weapon—unless they happen to encounter or have elven blood. Swords that are hanging on walls as trophies, or being guarded in the lairs of dragons for countless years could unwittingly be elf-tongues.

While Thore did craft hundreds of the blades with a hatred for elves, the number he made is not infinite. Unfortunately, if a person thinks he has an elf-tongue in his possession, holding it before someone with elven blood is one of the few ways to test the magic—and the most dangerous. One of the most significant drawbacks in finding an elf-tongue by other means is that only a high-level wizard is capable of discerning its true nature. Those lesser skilled in the mystic arts will detect the blades as magical, but not sense the loathing it eventually inflicts on the possessor.

The blades created by Thore Ironrock have no special immunity to damage, and can be destroyed by several different means. Repeated blunt trauma will eventually cause enough harm to damage the blade, as with high-level spells designed to permanently disenchant a magic item. Each elf-tongue has no distinguishing mark branding it the work of Thore Ironrock—though a master craftsman may be able to discern his work above others of lesser quality. Though they may be cursed, each one of the blades was of exceptional quality.

While those of lawful and good dispositions may wish to wipe out all elf-tongues, others see them in a light similar to that of Thore Ironrock. Orcs and other malevolent humanoids that know of their existence would pay a high price for one of these blades. Those who deal in black market goods have seen an increase in inquiries over the years regarding the availability of elf-tongue blades. It's almost as if someone is hoarding them for their own personal collection, or to once again wage war on the elven race.



Grimm's Reaver

History

Four hundred years ago Thian Vaal began his life as a poor farmer's son. From a small district on the outskirts of a considerable kingdom, Thian spent the first 15 years of his life harvesting wheat and corn with his two younger brothers and sisters, never thinking much about the world outside of his family's farm. Then without warning, war came to the land and all young men who could wield a weapon were conscripted into the King's army. Though he had never held a weapon in his hands before, Thian respected his duty to his liege and pledged his service to the cause of defending the land. Who the war was fought against and why is a tale for bards and elderly scribes. The only important thing was Thian emerged from the war unscathed a decade later under very mysterious circumstances.

During his time in the military Thian learned he had a talent for swordplay, as well as a stern devotion to the gods of the heavens. In his first years as a soldier Thian was befriended by a warrior named Grimm, who taught him of combat and the gods, and what an honor it is to serve them in battle. Grimm was a seasoned mercenary who always seemed to find himself in the middle of one battle or another. To Thian's surprise he constantly volunteered for some of the most dangerous missions available, and somehow always managed to survive. One day Thian asked him why he would put his life in such danger, and the warrior replied, "We all do what we must in this life. My existence is to kill my enemies and live to see another day. I wish you a better existence someday." Grimm's words stayed with Thian over the course of the war, even after his horrid death at the hands of the enemy.

Thian took Grimm's death hard, blaming himself for not being there to defend the elderly warrior from assassins sent to exterminate their opponent's leaders. To honor his dead friend Thian took Grimm's sword, which he suspected had magical powers, and swore revenge on his enemies for the death of his friend. With Grimm's sword in his hand, Thian Vaal reigned down terror and destruction on the opposing army. Many of the commanders of the army became frightened at what Thian had become, and some even thought he may be possessed by the angered soul of Grimm returned to wreak havoc on those that slew him. There was not one battle he did not win with Grimm's sword in his hand, and in most cases wiping out the opposing force down to the last man.

Behind Grimm's sword Thian quickly moved through the ranks, gaining several promotions and commenda-

tions for bravery in battle. All of it meant very little to the young warrior. Where once there was a young and innocent boy now stood a cold, calculating warrior bent on nothing more than death and revenge. It was this way of thinking that eventually won the war for his King, with a regiment led by Thian eliminating the opposing army's general and demanding their surrender.

After the War

In the days following the end of the war Thian felt a great emptiness wash over him. Grimm's death was avenged, for all intents, but still the young warrior felt a strange urge come wash over him from time to time for battle and blood. Thian initially never thought about returning home to his family's farm, or even accepting one of the many commissions offered to him to serve in the King's military. He tried to resist the compulsion to kill, but it lingered in the back of his mind. Thian then decided to return home and visit his parents, since they did not know whether he was alive or dead. With a pocket full of gold he began his long journey home. It was during this journey that he began to hear the voices.

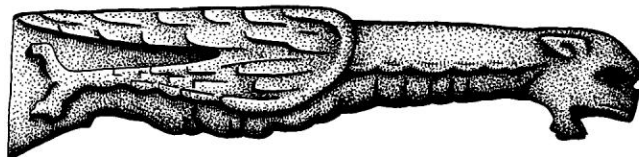
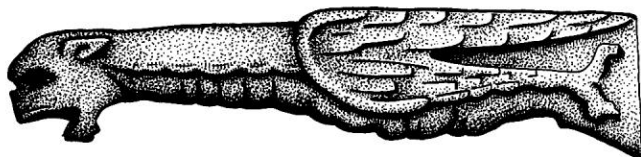
First there were dreams, which quickly turned into raging nightmares from which Thian awoke bathed in sweat. As the young warrior began to meet travelers on the road home, he began to hear whispers in his head telling him to kill them. At first it was easy to resist the voices, attributing them to the stress and fatigue of his journey. However, the closer he came to his family's farm the stronger the inclination to kill became. Thian tried to oblige the voice by hunting and killing a deer along the road, but this seemed to only make the voices more angry and insistent.

After a week of travel following the end of the war, Thian stood on a hillside overlooking his family's farmstead. Forgetting for a time about the unrelenting voices, Thian ran down the hill to greet the family he had not seen in over 10 years. Unknown to Thian, he had somehow drawn his weapon during his dash forward. As he approached his youngest brother gathering wheat his sword struck, killing him in an instant amidst his kin's horrid screams of mercy. Other members of Thian's family ran to the scene, and one by one they were struck down by the sword once belonging to Grimm.

Eventually the bloodshed ceased, but not before Thian Vaal had slain his entire family. Thian stood among the bodies with a distant look in his eye, and realized it was the sword all along, and he had finally succumbed to its malicious will to eradicate life.

Tenure of Control

Though Thian Vaal had given in to the powers of the sword, he still wanted to know more about its magical

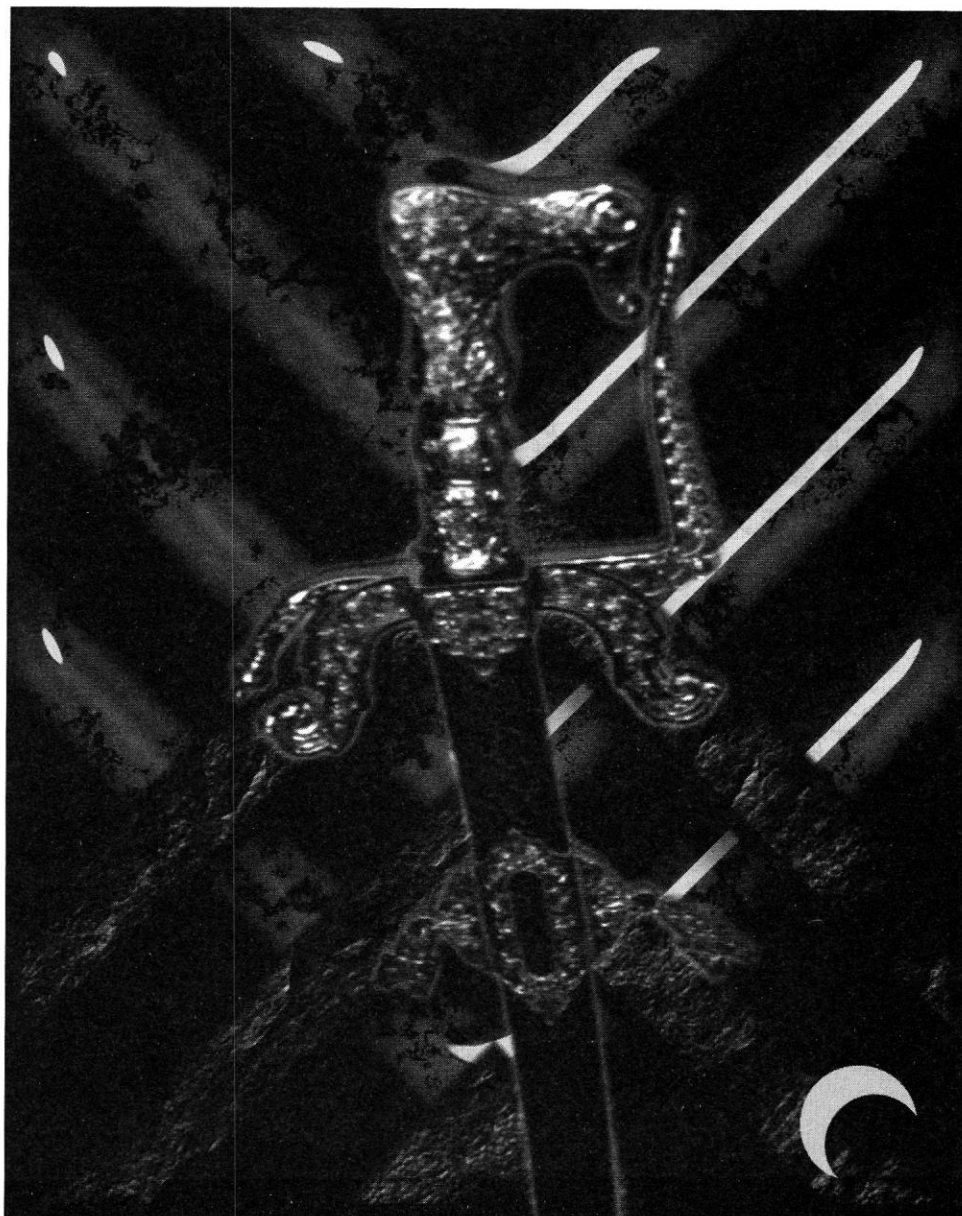


powers. Leaving the land he had called home all his life, Thian traveled to a distant province where none knew of him; in addition to fleeing possible pursuit for the death of his family. The young warrior soon found the services of a moderately powerful wizard, one he hoped could tell him more about Grimm's sword. The wizard was an elf named Almeniuss, and he soon uncovered the truth about this powerful sword.

Almeniuss was unsure of where Grimm had come across the blade, but he did tell Thian it was a rare sword known in some circles as a Reaver. Many of these blades were created long ago to be used in some forgotten war, and so powerful are they that even one could change the course of a conflict—as Thian had discovered. The sword actually feeds off of death—the more victims that fall to its edge the more potent it becomes over the course of a battle. When a battle is over and there are no more opponents to slay, the sword relinquishes control and returns to its scabbard. This power, however, does come with a price.

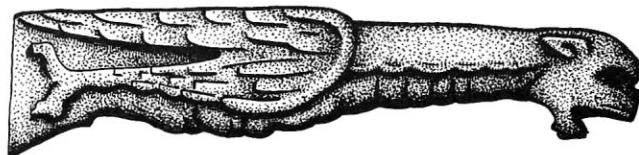
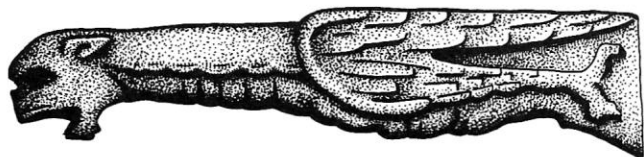
The elven wizard told Thian that eventually the sword demands its wielder to kill again. Forged to cleave the life from humans and humanoids alike, a Reaver blade cannot rest in its scabbard for long. For each day it does not drink an enemy's blood the sword begins sowing the seeds of violence in the wielder's mind. Eventually, if the sword is kept sheathed too long, it will take control of the possessor and force him to kill anyone nearby just to feed its compulsion for death. The elven wizard also theorized that if the sword's craving became too great, and there were none around to kill, the wielder may be forced to take his own life.

Thian paid the wizard and thanked him for his time, then quickly left the area before word of the blade's power could reach the ears of the local military—or anyone else who may crave the Reaver for his own. Thian Vaal was never heard from again. Almeniuss told no one of Thian and the Reaver that day, though years later he



would tell the sword's tale to a group of apprentices. Enthralled by the story, one of the acolytes wove Thian's tale into a tragic poem that is still told today.

The poem, which has also been retold as a tragic play, tells the story of a young warrior that goes off to battle to seek revenge over the death of his close friend. The chronicle recites that the soul of the man's friend lives within the sword, giving him strength and power. Here the story changes, depending on the telling. The tale sometimes says the sword must drink blood every day or the possessor will die that night, or that an angel comes to take the sword away. Whatever the account, the story ends with the warning that the Reaver will one day return to the hands of someone in need of revenge.



Blackheart

History

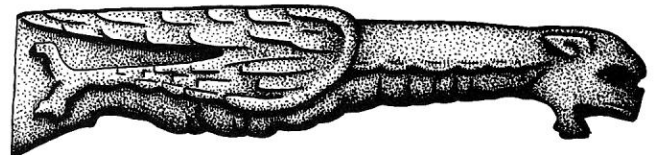
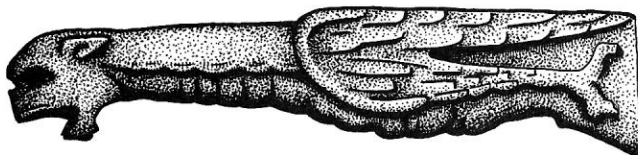
From the time he was a young boy, Vothar Starseeker wanted to be a paladin. Vothar was strong, captivating, prudent beyond his years, and it didn't take the virtuous clergy of his city long to see that Vothar would make an excellent paladin. The problem was his father, who opposed his only son entering into what he called, "...a bunch of zealots given a license to kill in the name of righteousness." Vothar's lineage was of noble birth, and as such he had responsibilities to his family and sovereign that, in his father's eyes, took precedence over becoming a paladin. More than once Vothar received the back of his father's hands for what he considered to be foolish and impracticable dreams. Consulting with the local clerics, Vothar had only one option left – run away to another city and attempt to become a paladin far from home.

In defiance of his family, Vothar became a paladin after years of training and devotion to the gods of good. While still young in his chosen profession, the fledgling paladin took on a daring quest, despite the disapproval of his clergy. This mission was a lofty one – eradicate the undead forces of the renowned blackguard Sar'naur. With a few retainers at his side, Vothar attempted to use stealth to enter the holdings of the anti-paladin, and hopefully surprise him and send his soul

quickly to the Underworld. With Sar'naur dead, many believed his undead militia would be stripped of their unlife and fall useless to the ground. The task was not an easy one, as Sar'naur had surrounded himself with not only undead, but retainers whose hearts were as black as his own. Vile clerics and cultists seemed to be everywhere, and it was Vothar's hope they could sneak by most of them and strike down the heart of the evil – Sar'naur himself.

To his utter surprise, that is exactly what happened. Sar'naur fell surprisingly quickly in battle, as did many of his underworld minions, and with his death the army of undead under his control turned to dust. Overconfident from the easy victory, Vothar gathered up the possessions of the blackguard, as well as a hoard of treasure he planned to donate to his church – despite the warnings of his companions that some of the items may be evil. Using

his power to sense evil, Vothar searched Sar'naur's holding thoroughly for anything of a foul nature. Finding very little in his search Vothar grew overconfident in his victory, believing himself to be more commanding than others had given him credit. He had, after all, killed one of the most evil blackguards to ever walk the land. It wasn't until Vothar accidentally grasped the hilt of Sar'naur's sword that he realized his grievous error in judgment.



Dual Identities

Sar'naur was not a blackguard, at least not willingly. The man known for many years as a formidable opponent of good in the region was in fact a lowly arms merchant who one day came into possession of a powerful magical sword. The sword in Sar'naur's possession, a blade which called itself 'Blackheart', actually contains the soul of a long dead blackguard that continues to spread its evil throughout the land by possessing anyone grasping its hilt. In the final moments before his death Sar'naur's will reasserted itself and allowed Vothar to mercifully kill him, ending three decades of possession by the blade. When Vothar grasped the Blackheart blade, a battle for control of Vothar's body had begun.

It was an easy matter for Blackheart to possess the feeble mind of Sar'naur, but a vigilant paladin such as Vothar was another matter. The battle of the two minds was a difficult one, with the initial victory going to Vothar. However, even though he had temporarily suppressed the ego of the blade he found he could not rid himself of the cursed sword, nor could he tell anyone of what was happening to him. In the days following the defeat of the host Sar'naur the paladin tried all he could to rid himself of Blackheart, but to no avail. Eventually Vothar was overcome with exhaustion, and when his mind fell asleep from fatigue the consciousness of Blackheart took control. Once Vothar's mind had time to rest, however, he was able to once again seize control of his body.

When he first 'awoke' Vothar discovered all of his retainers, those who had traveled with him to defeat Sar'naur, were dead by the cursed blade. The demented soul had even dressed him in Sar'naur's clothing, to the disgust of the paladin when he had awakened. Amidst his grief, Vothar knew he could never return to the life he once had. Eventually, the soul of the blackguard would infiltrate and massacre his companions in the clergy, as well as countless other innocents. Before the blade had a chance to overwhelm him again, Vothar had to prevent any further loss of life at his hands that he possibly could.

Of Two Minds

Only death, such as the fate of Sar'naur, could free Vothar from the curse of the sword Blackheart. While the paladin found he could easily commit suicide while in control of his faculties, he could not allow the sword to fall into the hands of one with less conviction and strength of will. Should the sword possess another like Sar'naur and reign terror on the world once again, the spirit of Vothar would never find rest in the afterlife. Hence, the paladin took it upon himself that as long as he lived he would do what he could to destroy Blackheart, or at the very least prevent it from taking any more lives.

Unfortunately, this was a very arduous undertaking.

Vothar Starseeker did what he could to prevent the vile soul of the blackguard from committing atrocities while in control of his body, but he did not succeed. The paladin tried to isolate himself from humanity, but always again awoke within the confines of some community or other populace. Vothar quickly learned that the soul within the sword was extremely intelligent and cunning, and often the two would engage in a battle of wits to see who could accomplish what while in control of the paladin's body. Time, however, seemed to be on the side of the cursed blade.

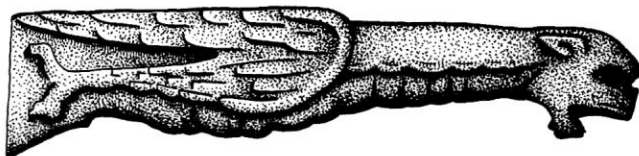
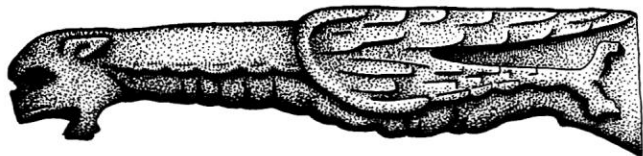
As the years passed the cursed blade Blackheart seemed to get stronger and stronger, likely due to the increasing age of Vothar's body and the weariness of his soul. Still, the paladin was determined to remain vigilant in his battle against the blade. While the power of the sword prevented him from imparting the curse to others, he decided to find a way to permanently hide the blade from the world of man. Gathering maps of remote mountains and isolated lands, Vothar one day disappeared from the lands of man.

There were a few followers of law that believed Vothar had turned evil, and pursued him with vigilance until the day he disappeared. Before disappearing Vothar had a hefty price on his head, one that keeps bounty hunters searching for him to this day. Today, it is said that a trail had been left by Vothar for any vigilant enough to find it. In addition to the price on his head, Vothar's church has a reward for anyone with credible evidence as to the paladin's final fate.

Blackheart's Soul

The Blackheart sword is pure evil, with only chaos and destruction to feed its undying soul. Such is the way of the blackguard, and this has carried over into the will of the sword. If Vothar ever discovered who created the blade, or the name of the blackguard who empowered it, he never imparted the information to anyone. There are no records indicating the true nature of the sword's power prior to it coming into Vothar's possession.

Those falling victim to the sword's powerful curse will, if not impeded, attempt to establish a blackguard holding from which to terrorize the surrounding countryside. The sword's host then attempts to gather evil followers (especially clerics) and build an army of undead to increase the size of its domain. This pattern is similar to that established by Sar'naur, but was disrupted by Vothar's limited ability to block the sword's power. If the sword is ever found and claimed by someone of lesser resolve, the evil that was the essence of a blackguard will once again return.



Scimitar of the Ancestors

The Renaven Scimitar is an item of legend, whose story is known throughout the surrounding lands. Renaven is one of the ancient names of the land known as Cormut; the line has existed since before the nation's founding. Many famous figures of history held that name: Harald the Red was the third king of Cormut; Nathen the Just made his legacy in the War of Stones; Gretchen the Farsighted saved the ancestral home from goblins with her legendary aim. These are only a few; the histories are filled with others.

The sword was first noted in the family records in 728. It is mentioned as one of the possessions distributed to the heirs of Cathan, the nominal head of the Renaven family and Duke of Senec. The sword—along with the manor, title, and a large portion of the family wealth—was bequeathed to his son, Walther. The story of how Cathan came to have the scimitar was never factually explained. The family legend, however, was recorded at last in 922.

According to legend, Cathan Renaven was wounded in the battle of Kelwarneys. He had taken a spear in his side, and the wound looked deep. He had been overrun by enemy soldiers and left on the field of battle, his sword and armor stripped from him as he lay unconscious. It's said that he laid on the field for a day before awakening, not dead at all. He made his way off the battlefield, away from the corpses of a thousand fellow soldiers. Although he could stand and walk, he was weak from loss of blood and pain. He had taken neither food nor water since his injury, leaving him in danger of collapse.

Cathan, ever resourceful, made his way into the Moondeep Woods. He had trained with a woodsman as a young boy, and so felt reasonably sure of both evading capture and finding sustenance. First, he bandaged himself using moss from the rocks and spider webs from the trees, tearing his shirt into strips and tying it tightly around his stomach. Then he began searching for food.

Cathan had not been searching long when he found a fox, its leg caught in a poacher's snare. (For those unfamiliar with the area, the Moondeep Woods are sanctified to the goddess Kryanae; hunting of any sort is forbidden.) He was a pious man, whose devotion to Kryanae was unquestioned. Still, he knew that he must find something to eat, and the poor wounded fox was unlikely to survive long once it had been trapped.

He walked over to the frightened animal and picked up a rock, planning to end the animal's suffering. The fox looked up at him calmly, however, without any fear. Cathan saw in its eyes such a pleading, yet calm expression that he could not bring himself to kill the fox. He put

down the stone and instead set about dismantling the snare. As he did so, he noticed that although the fox's leg was trapped, it did not seem to be broken. He set to his work with a fresh resolve, and it was not long before the little fox was free.

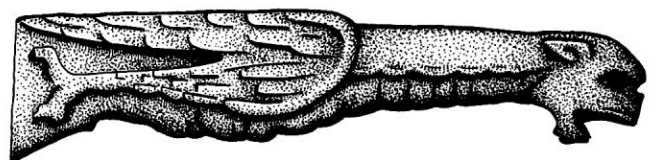
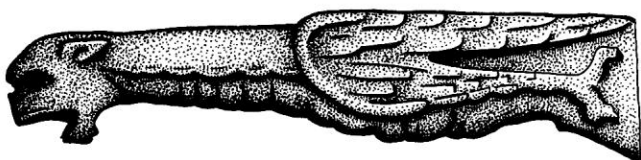
The animal ran from Cathan as soon as it was able, and he was left yet again with nothing to eat. He began wandering through the woods again in search of food, but found nothing. Faintness had nearly overtaken him when he saw another fox, standing on the edge of a clearing. The fox looked straight at him as well, showing no fear. Instead, it seemed curious, almost friendly. At this point, Cathan could not be sure he was not imagining things. He took a chance, however, and walked toward the animal. The fox waited until Cathan drew quite near, then walked slowly into the trees. It waited there until Cathan followed, then retreated a bit further. This pattern continued until they came upon a small spring, deep within the woodland.

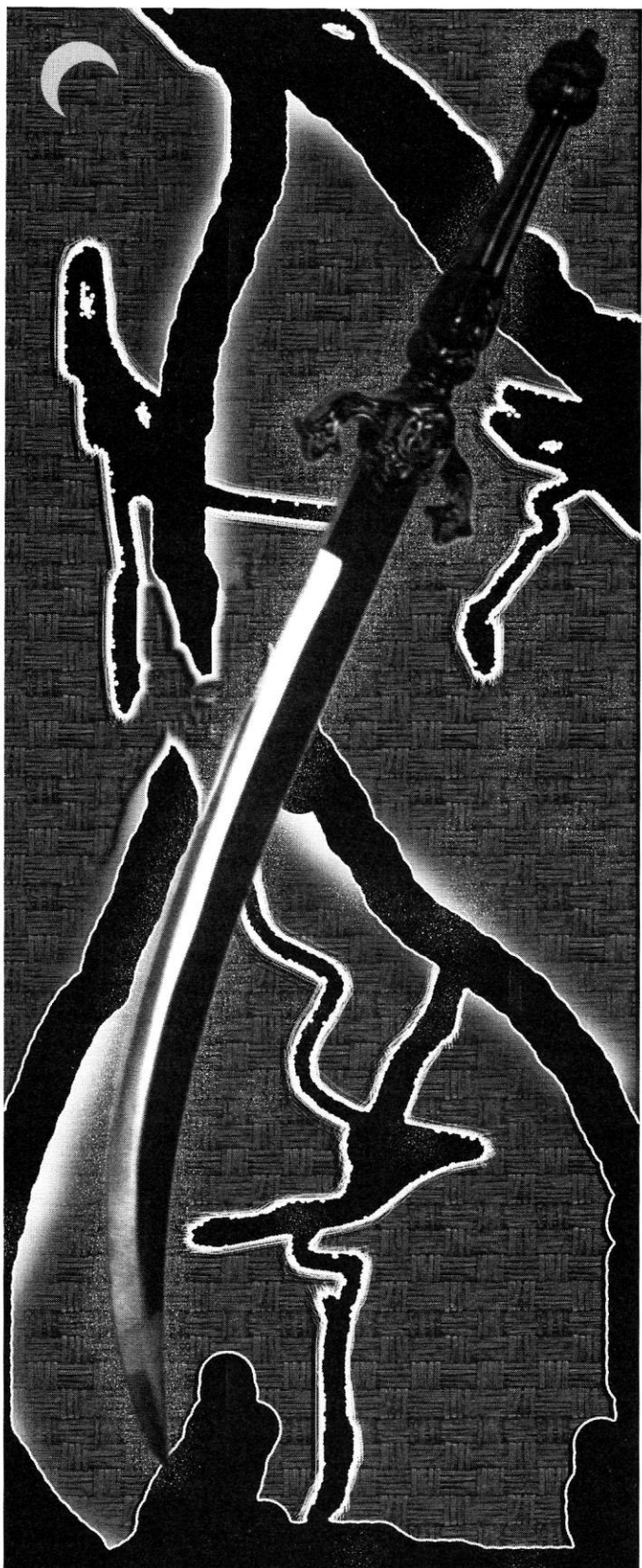
Cathan rejoiced to see the spring, giving thanks to his goddess. He drank his fill at the stream, and found wild strawberries, priest-cap mushrooms and watercress for his dinner. He ate until he could hold no more, then laid down on the soft moss at the water's edge to rest. As he slept, he dreamt that he sat by the pool on a warm, clear night. He could see the moon reflected on the water's surface, and as he stared at it, it took on the form of a beautiful woman. "You preserved the sanctity of my lands and kept my laws, rescuing one of my servants in the process. You cared more for me than your own self-preservation, and for that you shall be rewarded."

The lady from his dream then lifted a sword from the waters, the blade of which was curved like the moon's flight overhead. "This sword will preserve you and yours from harm, serving you and your heirs until the end of all things. That is its sole purpose; it will not aid you in any other endeavor. In return, I charge you to ensure that your children, and children's children, remember me and obey my word."

The dream ended then, and he slept the rest of the night soundly. It was only in the morning, when he awoke, that he found the sword next to him and his wounds healed. He realized that Kryanae had truly blessed him, and returned home with all haste. Legends aside, what is known is that the battle did take place, Cathan was missing for three days, and he did return home unexpectedly with a strange, curved sword.

When Cathan bequeathed the sword to Walther, he did so with a series of instructions. Failure to follow these instructions would result in the sword's ownership being transferred to his younger brother, and so on down the family line. Walther was determined that the sword stay within the ancestral seat, however, so he made sure that





his father's instructions were followed to the letter.

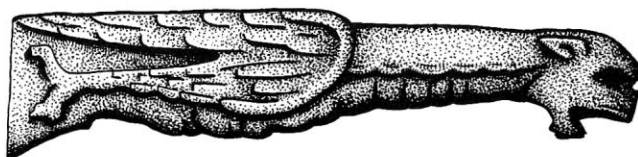
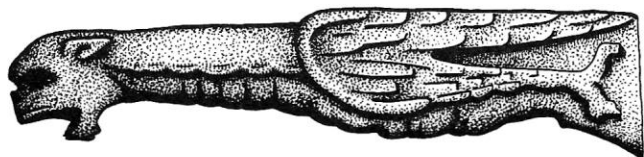
Along with a new chapel to the goddess Kryanae, an oath not to hunt foxes, and a promise to send one of his children to the priesthood, Cathan asked that the sword be given a place of honor in the Renaven home. These strictures have become de rigeur for the entire Renaven line, as it happens, with all family members participating whether in line for the inheritance or not.

Walther Renaven took his duties as the new duke very seriously, and proceeded to have a special room for the scimitar. It is described as being fifteen feet wide by twenty feet long, with a beautiful ebony and lapis-inlaid cabinet at one end. The cabinet's doors are made of glass and fit seamlessly. Inside the case is a gold sword stand, where the scimitar is displayed against a background of deep blue velvet.

The scimitar itself has surfaced many times in the centuries since Walther inherited it, usually in times of great need for the family and nation. It is said to choose its wielder from among the members of the Renaven line, though it has sometimes chosen a retainer of the family instead, when no family members exist of an appropriate age or temperament. The most recent example of this is when the steward's son, young Jon Wrethen, was chosen to defend the youngest daughter of the Renaven line against a magically concealed assassin sent by a rival family. With the scimitar's help, he defeated the would-be killer and saved Carolin's life, thereby winning her love as well.

The Renaven family has indeed come to depend on the sword greatly, as much for the success and protection it symbolizes as for its actual aid. This reliance has not been lost on the Renaven family's rivals. It is widely rumored that should the sword ever be taken by force from the Renaven family, the line would see its end within a year. There is no documentation to support such an allegation, but many attempts have been made, nonetheless. Still, no attempt to steal the weapon has ever succeeded, and most who try are found dead within the sword chamber of Renaven House itself. To this date, none have in even touching the cabinet doors.

—From *The Renaven Noble Line: A History*, by Anastasius the Sage



Wizards' Friend

To: Mina Rostov,
Magus of Soulsend Keep

Sister,

I fear it has been too long since I have written to you. I must beg your forgiveness on that point; while I have no good excuse, I feel sure that the token accompanying this letter will help ease the neglect you must feel. But more on that later.

I hope that this finds you in good health. My own health is still excellent, as is Charles's. He bids me send you his fondest greetings as well. He is still determined to find common ground between the King and the Courts of Calladan, a dream I consider futile. Were it not for Charles's dreams, though, we might be fighting many more wars for the king than we currently do. Therefore, I do my best to always offer him my full support. I find that to do otherwise invariably makes me seem foolish later on. Please respond quickly with news on your own dear family, and convey my greetings to them all, especially Mama.

Laurel is in Calavar, studying the magical arts. I would have happily kept her home as I can always make use of another apprentice, but Charles convinced me that she would do better there. I know in my heart it is true, as I remember our days at Calavar fondly, but I still find myself at a loss to imagine how she should be going there so soon. I swear, if we could but find a way to extend childhood, we could all retire as wealthy lords.

My studies into the properties of elemental weapon enchantments are yielding some interesting, if not entirely useful, results. The elementals themselves have proven particularly challenging to work with, but I believe I have mastered the Terran language well enough to be sufficiently understood by the elemental of earth with whom I have been working. I know my inflections are still wrong, however, because occasionally after I butcher a particularly complex grammatical construction, I would swear that it is laughing at me. I have nearly relented and cast the spell of tongues more than once, but this particular elemental has made it known that he feels such shortcuts are lazy and ill-mannered. Therefore, I must struggle for my art. How do your own studies progress?

And now, having rambled on for some length in hopes of raising your anticipation, I will state the reason for sending this message by courier, instead of some more secure, arcane method that would surely speed the news along. I have an item I particularly wish to pass along to you. I received a message from a strange young oracle named Julius, telling me that you were one step closer to

certain death. I was worried at first, until I checked my calendar. I then realized that your son was being too kind to his old aunt by reminding her of his mother's birthday. So, in short: Happy Birthday, Mina!

The enclosed present is one I feel sure will serve you well. I crafted it with you in mind, keeping first in my thoughts your unusual love of weapons. I still remember well the shock on Mama's face when you declared your intention to serve in the Queen's guard, especially as I knew you were only half-joking. Still, the arcane world would have been the poorer without you, Mina. While I may not have been the best example for you to follow, I walked more proudly knowing that you chose the same path as I.

The enclosed dagger has a number of special properties, all designed to aid you in those "wanderings," of which you are still so fond. I confess that the urge to go out into the world in search of adventure left me some years ago. Still, I would never deny you the enjoyment you gain from its pursuit.

I designed the item to take care of some of the peskier details that you often forget to bother with (such as divination and healing magics). I also arranged for it to be a good traveling companion, as it will never eat your share of rations and yet may prove in the end to have more sense than you (at least in some cases). It will insist on sharing your tent, I'm afraid, but I do not believe it will ever steal your blankets. Its name is Rashtan, and I hope it will serve you for many years to come. If I've left anything of its nature out, I'm sure it will inform you in due course.

I am afraid that Rashtan was the reason I did not write sooner, as I was a bit preoccupied with its construction. I hope, however, now that you know the circumstances, you will forgive me this once. Write back soon, with news of you and your family and everything that has occurred since I saw you last. I will keep you in my thoughts 'till then.

With all my love,

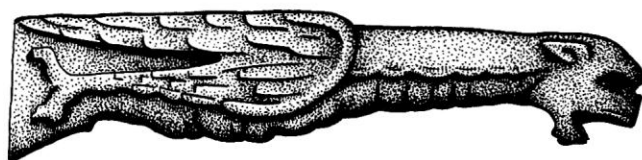
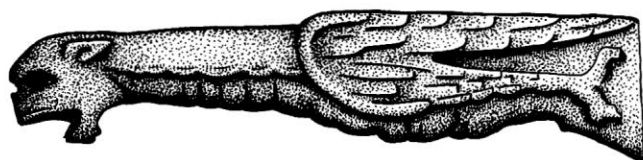
Amelia

—Note from Amelia Rostov to Mina Rostov, discovered on the body of one Kelvin Beriskov, courier

Town Watch Report, Ouria 19, 1072

Captain Menhiam,

Our patrol had been called out along the Main Road to help a caravan who was stuck a few miles outside town. On the way out to the caravan, Jacob spotted something



sticking out from under a clump of bushes. Upon further investigation, we discovered the body of a young man wearing livery we didn't recognize. His head had been bashed in, and his clothes were ripped up, as though there had been a struggle. Based on the letter we found, we suspect that he was robbed since there was no package to speak of. The letter was folded up and tucked inside his sash, which is probably why the bandits missed it.

We searched around, but we couldn't find any other victims. That probably means that the young man was by himself (a stupid thing to do) or else the people with him took off. The Main Road being as busy as it is, though, we weren't able to find any useful tracks.

We disposed of the corpse by burying it roughly 50 feet off the main road. Ordinarily we would have taken it back to town for the priests to have a look at, but the poor guy had already been dead for a couple of days. I decided it was safer to put him to rest there. If the priest would like to perform a ritual, we can show him where the grave is.

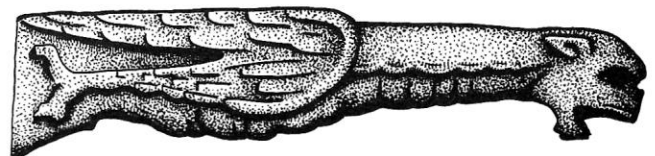
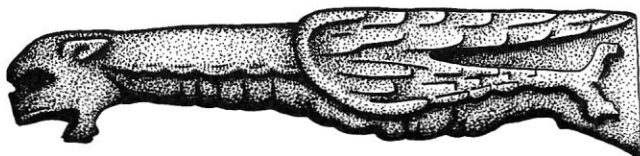
As to who did this, we think it was likely the bandits who have been holed up in the Dark Hills, east of town. They've been getting more active of late, and they're starting to be pretty daring. I'd suggest that we increase the frequency of patrols along the Main Road, or else talk Lord Stefan into sending a group after them. Jacob mentioned that he thinks it might be someone new, or else a lone cutpurse, but he couldn't point to any proof.

The blood on the victim's sword probably means that he managed to wound whoever did this to him. I'd suggest that we ask the priests if they've cured any wounded folks lately who might have run into the wrong end of a sword. Also, if anyone comes through carrying a fancy dagger without a good story, we should probably detain them. Warren has volunteered to go find the lady who wrote the letter and inform her what happened, but I'm not sure if we can spare him currently. Perhaps later this month we can arrange to try and trace the mage who sent the man.

As to the caravan, we successfully helped them fix the broken wheel on their wagon and arranged to act as security on

the way back to town. The caravan owner, Madam Louisa, was very pleased. We took a cautious pace getting back to town, and thus we arrived a day and a half late. Nevertheless, the caravan was protected and the cargo was secured.

Sergeant Cole



Dagger of Defense

Once again, welcome to the Royal Exhibition Hall. We bring you today a crowning achievement, an exhibit of enchanted weapons created by the master smith and wizard, Penelaus. If you are visiting us for the first time, we remind you that all areas beyond the ropes are restricted. Trespassing into those areas will result in ejection from the exhibit hall, as well as suitable punishment by our security staff. Please help make everyone's visit enjoyable by cooperating with these rules.

In addition, we ask all visitors to remember that the blades here are sentient and can understand you when you speak. We have warded the viewing area against some of the more egregious powers that some blades might manifest, but we ask that you be courteous and respectful if a sword should address you. Thank you for your cooperation.

Penelaus was born Jorge Seraph Penelaus, in the mountains of Geradum. His parents were both tradesmen, and his early childhood was largely uneventful. At the age of seven, Penelaus was apprenticed to the local smith, where he served until achieving journeyman status at the age of 18. At that point, he began traveling, where the wizard Morwen noticed him.

Morwen spotted latent magical ability within him, much to his surprise. She convinced him to begin magical studies with her, an occupation that kept him busy for the next decade. At the end of that time he parted ways with Morwen and completed his masterwork creation, an item he then enchanted and called "Axe of Sundering." This item is #1 in our exhibit.

Penelaus then began traveling even more earnestly. He no longer wished for the life of a smith, as magical powers coursed through his veins, but neither did he wish to abandon the craft he had come to love. He took on the life of an itinerant wizard and warrior for hire, a mixture of skills that led him into some very dangerous adventures. He stayed in that life for another 10 years, until he amassed wealth to build his own keep and begin research into his true love, weapons and their enchantments.

...Now we come to item #23 in our exhibit, the sword known as "Dragon's Tooth." It has also been called "Sword breaker" and "Silver Mongoose" during its illustrious history, the latter in reference to the way a mongoose lunges at a serpent, curve its neck so that its head is behind the serpent's, then bite and break the snake's back.

Penelaus created this sword in his fifty-third year of age. During that period in his life, Penelaus was fascinated by the art of fencing. He created many fine rapiers, such as #16 in our display, "Dancing Rain." According to his journal, though, by the time he came to create the

Dragon's Tooth he began to feel as though some crucial element of the style were eluding him.

To pin down what it was he lacked, he spoke with several masters of the style, including Eduardo de la Rosa. Eduardo was an established maestro of the rapier, with several accolades to his credit. He had served his king as the Master of Arms, and had amassed his own small fortune by helping to eradicate some of the more dangerous threats to the kingdom through the years.

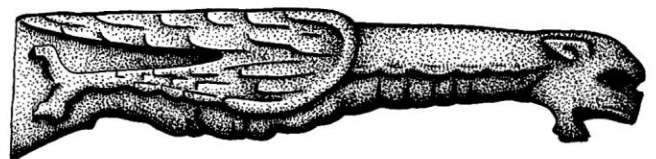
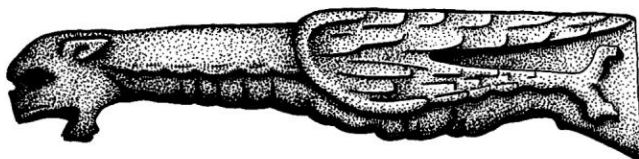
Eduardo demonstrated the use of the secondary dagger, which he called a "main-gauche." He explained how this advanced technique was used, where the dagger is used primarily for defense against an opponent, but can also provide the opportunity for quick attacks if the opponent is taken off-guard. Penelaus was fascinated with Eduardo's fighting, and wrote in his journal that "the man is like a willow branch, dancing in the wind. He flies from one stance to the next, his movements flowing like water. The use of a dagger in the off-hand is also incredibly effective, but it requires two superb weapons to make it work."

Penelaus was so enthusiastic about Eduardo's discovery, that Eduardo was moved to show the wizard a weapon of his own design. The dagger Eduardo showed to Penelaus was highly unusual, with two blades set roughly a half-inch apart. A half-inch wide bar joined them two inches from the hilt, making the end effect highly unusual. This dagger is also part of our exhibit, item #32.

Eduardo explained that the dagger was used to catch the sword of an opponent between the dagger's blades. The dagger could then be twisted to "catch" the opponent's blade, possibly even snapping it if used in the right situation. While certainly an ingenuous invention, there were some drawbacks to the design. Firstly, it would only work properly if one's opponent were also fighting with a rapier. Otherwise, the gap would be too narrow to catch the blade of another sword properly, and it would require much more force on Eduardo's part to capture and hold such a blade, regardless.

Secondly, the double-bladed dagger was unwieldy to use in any other manner. Its dual points meant that stabbing with it would be difficult, and the odds of missing or misplacing the attack were far greater. In addition, it would be relatively easy for such a weapon to be broken as compared with a standard dagger.

As Penelaus studied the weapon, he hit upon what seemed to him a better solution. He immediately returned to his home and began constructing a fine dagger with an unusual blade. This dagger was double edged and curved, with an odd hook on the end resembling a dragon's head. It would be useless for stabbing, but the edges still made an effective slashing weapon, as well as provid-



ing the requisite area for capturing an opponent's sword.

When Penelaus finished crafting the item, he took it back to Eduardo for an opinion. The fencing master was delighted and proceeded to put it through a number of trials. He quickly was able to develop a unique style for the weapon, and begged the use of it from Penelaus. The wizard dissembled, however, and claimed that he required a bit more time to study the weapon before he could part with it. Reluctantly, Eduardo agreed and gave the dagger back into Penelaus's care.

Penelaus took the dagger back to his home once more, delighted with Eduardo's response to it. He had rarely found a more knowledgeable and enthusiastic audience for his creations, and it seemed to renew in him the excitement of his youth. Out of gratitude for his rediscovered joy in his creations, he set about enchanting the item so that it would prove useful to Eduardo.

Penelaus spent nearly two months in his workshop, carefully preparing and enchanting the item. He breathed awareness and spirit into the item, imbuing it with a personality he hoped would complement Eduardo's. He enhanced its abilities as a swordbreaker, giving its wielder additional advantages when attempting such maneuvers. He also gave it exceptional defensive

capabilities: in short, everything that a defensive dagger could need.

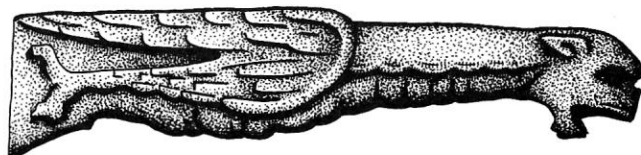
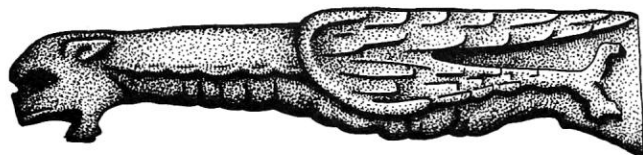
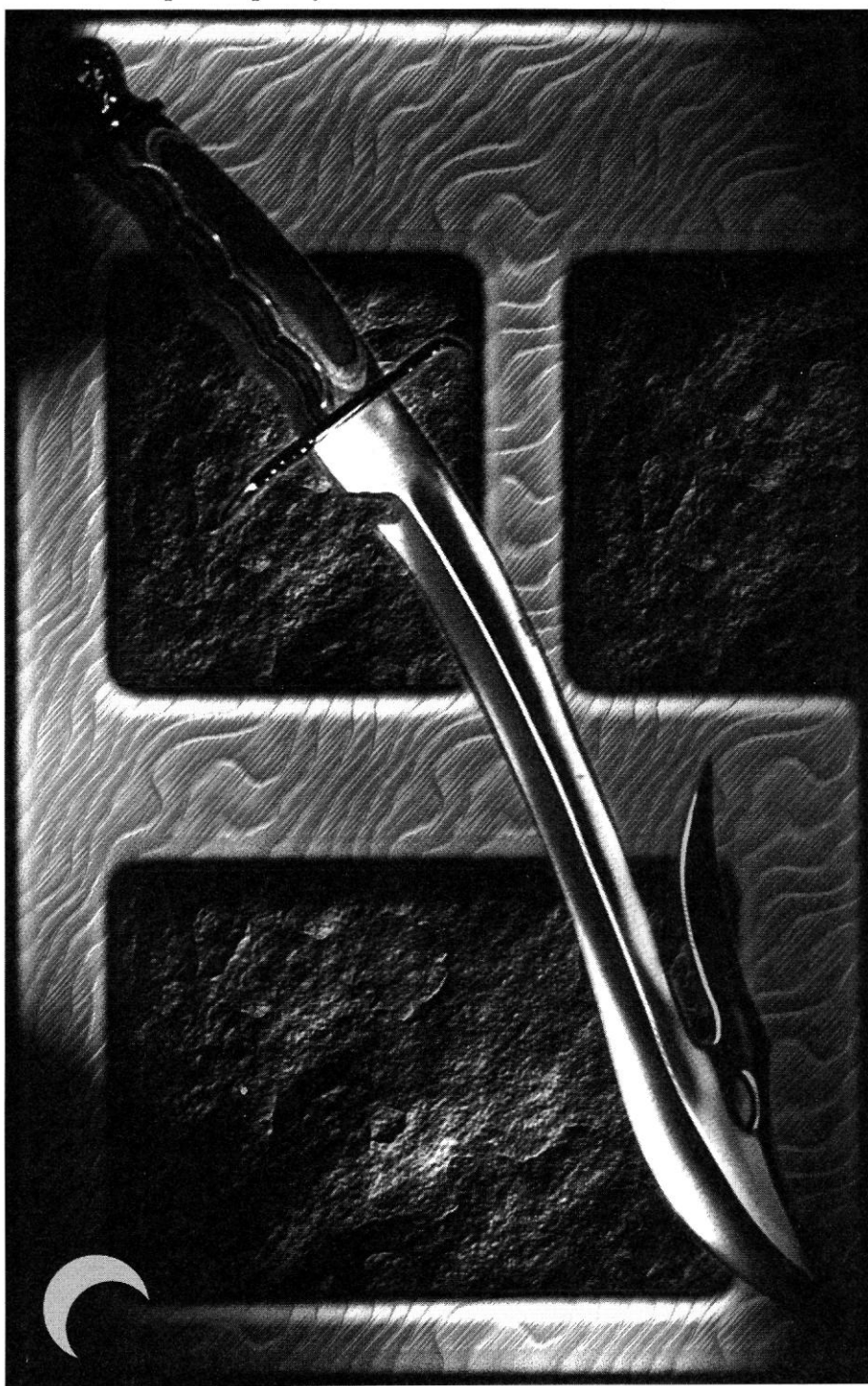
When he returned to give it to Eduardo, the fencing master was ecstatic. The two of them stayed together several more months, with Eduardo insisting on having

Penelaus as a guest in repayment of the great gift he had received. The two remained fast friends even afterward, regularly corresponding with one another and visiting each other often. When an old enemy kidnapped Eduardo's son, it was Penelaus who assisted in retrieving the young man. When Penelaus's granddaughter fell ill, it was Eduardo who guarded the high priest through hazardous travel until they reached her. In short, they became true friends until Penelaus's untimely demise after being attacked by an unknown assassin.

Eduardo searched for his friend's killer for years, but was unable to discover his or her identity. At Eduardo's death, the dagger was bequeathed to the fencing school he started, to be used by the headmasters to continue the style he perfected. There it has remained for decades, until being

loaned to us this month.

Our next item is #24, the sword known as Mirror's Bite....



Soulson, the Longsword of Dalan the Elder

King of the Presstins over a hundred years ago, Dalan the Elder was one of the greatest rulers the Presstins ever had, second only to his son, Dalan the Younger. Dalan the Elder was the fifth and youngest son of King Lexor VII, so no one ever expected much from him. Instead of encouraging him to study the arts of combat and leadership, his father let him do whatever he wanted, instead focusing his paternal energies on developing Dalan's eldest brothers.

So Dalan studied history and magic for most of his childhood and even much of his early adult life. While his older brothers became first soldiers and then generals, Dalan continued his academics, both learning and teaching at the royal academy. He did begin training as a warrior after his third brother was killed as a concession to his father, but he concentrated mostly on his studies. He quickly outpaced the best instructors and professors in the kingdom, so he left the palace and traveled abroad, searching for those who could teach him more about the world and about the intricacies of magic.

Dalan remained outside the Presstin Kingdom for nearly two decades, traveling in disguise and spending time with the wisest men he could find. Indeed, he was gone for so long that his entire family thought he was dead - he was so enthralled in his studies that he barely noted the passage of time and never bothered to send word back to his father.

But then the unthinkable happened.

King Lexor VII and his three surviving eldest sons led the bulk of the Presstin armies into battle against the combined forces of the nomadic trolls and orcs of the Erylan Wyld. So intent was Lexor on crushing the trolls and orcs that he didn't take notice of the reports that the dwarves of Thorgund were massing their own forces in underground fortresses.

While Lexor and his sons moved against the trolls and orcs, the dwarves surfaced and shadowed the Presstin armies, attacking only after the Presstins had crushed the nomadic tribes but before they had time to regroup and rest.

Lexor VII and his three sons died that very same day, as did most of the Presstin army. The few that managed to make their way back home told stories of the dwarven hordes coming out of the ground to avenge some unknown wrong.

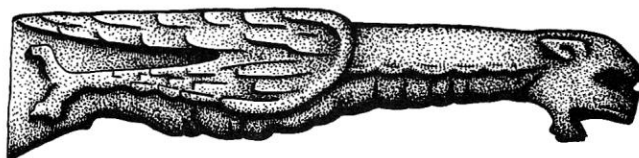
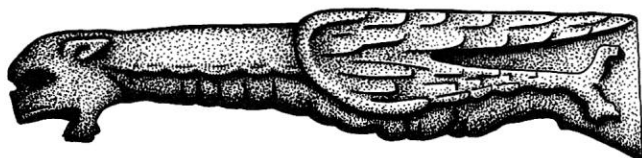
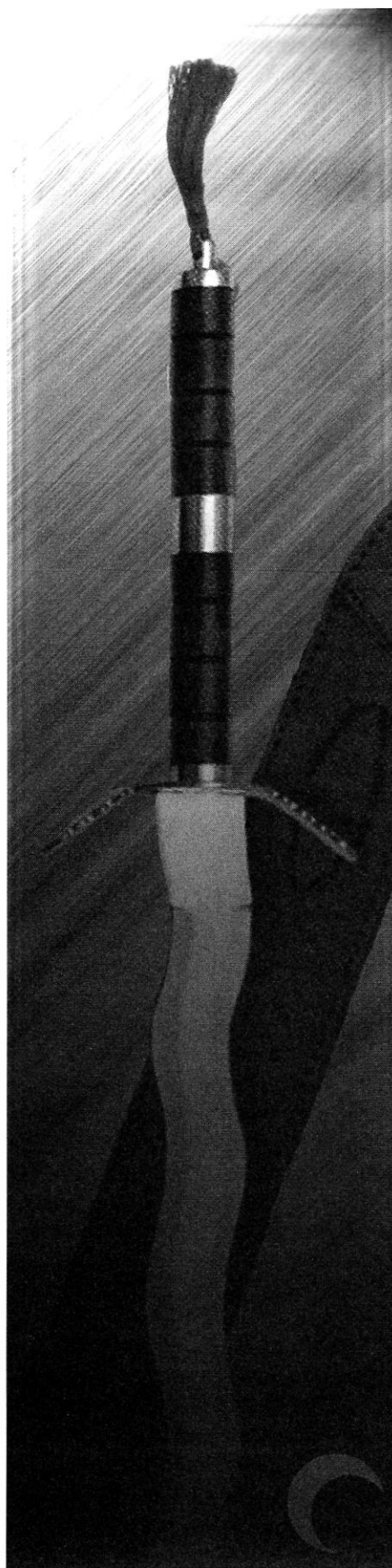
The Presstin Kingdom was thrown into chaos as the various ministers vied for power. Then Dalan suddenly reappeared in the palace, with an elven wife at his left side and a coterie of wizards and wisemen at his right,

ready to claim his birthright.

They, of course, did not accept Dalan. Try as they did, they could not deter Dalan, however. He had developed an incredible attunement for magic during his years away from the palace. When he was done with the guards that tried to take him prisoner, he turned his attention to his father's ministers, sycophants all. Mere hours after he reappeared, he had dismantled his father's entire leadership structure.

But he had greater worries than the legacy of Lexor and his ministers. The dwarves had crushed his kingdom's armies and were now on their way to conquer his nation. He had but three days to prepare his people.

Dalan immediately



put his circle of wizards and wisemen to work, gathering help from the four corners of the continent while he made the final preparations for his ascension to the rule of Presstin.

An ancient decree required any would-be king to be able to prove himself in armed combat. Moreover, the sword that he used would be the symbol of his rule, would embody the transfer of royal power. Each was uniquely created for the king-to-be and therefore no simple sword could fill such an important role. Nothing in the palace would do.

In his lengthy travels, however, he had come upon a master swordsmith that crafted the finest blades he had ever seen. Dalan had spent many months in the town with that swordsmith, learning about the rare metals he used while at the same time teaching the man what he knew about history and nature. When he learned all he could, Dalan promised that he would return some day. "When you do," the swordsmith said, "you shall have a gift of incredible worth waiting." Dalan needed him.

Even though time and distance usually mean little to a powerful wizard, Dalan had little time to waste. He used his powers to take him to the small town, surprising the swordsmith with his sudden appearance. Dalan spared no time for greetings. "I need your assistance. My kingdom will be lost without you. Will you help me?"

"Of course, my friend," the swordsmith told him. "But first, I must give you what is yours." He entered his shop for a moment before returning with a case. "For you. I hope it is enough for a king."

Inside was a blade of incredible beauty; a two-handed sword, with a golden handguard and the finest mahogany, inlaid with more gold, forming the grip. The blade itself was a Kris, shaped from a single piece of adamantite alloy folded back on itself a thousand times. It was the sword of a king. But it was not ready yet.

He immediately returned to the palace with the swordsmith, who himself went to work in the royal armory while Dalan locked himself in his suite with two of his closest advisors and began the incantations to enchant the weapon. The three of them spent every last minute readying the weapon for Dalan's first test of leadership.

While they did so, Dalan's other comrades and even his mother and sisters prepared for the dwarven army's approach. They raised and armed a home guard, going so far as to organize the people within the Pressin capital into citizen brigades should all else fail.

Dalan emerged from his seclusion with only a few hours to spare. As the dwarves advanced upon the city, Dalan addressed his people. "King Luxor is dead, as are

my brothers. Those that are responsible for that act are nearing our gates. We have no time for ceremonies or custom." He raised his sword above his head. "With this sword in hand, I will lead us to victory. And when I return, it will be as your king!"

With that, he led his green army out of the city to meet the approaching dwarves of Thorgund. Had he only his new army, he certainly would have failed. But Dalan also had his friends, his allies and the allies of his allies.

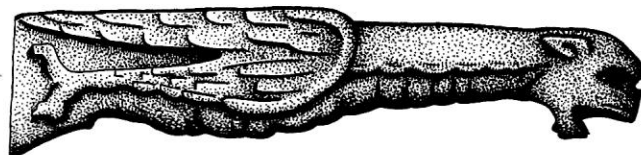
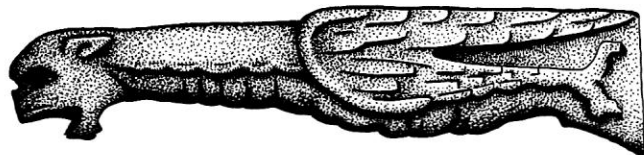
When the two sides met on the plains outside the city, the dwarven force outnumbered the Presstin army almost two-to-one. The dwarven general thought he had certain victory on his hands. But then Dalan's allies unleashed their fury. A hundred magic users launched spell after spell at the unprepared dwarven army, surrounding them while Dalan led his new legion into the heart of the dwarven formation. Relying primarily on his sword and armor, Dalan fought as hard and bravely as any of his men. The sword literally sang to Dalan and those around them, bringing the most out of them and protecting them from the blows of the more skilled dwarven fighters. Lesser swords shattered when struck by Dalan's blade, and armor seemingly melted away. None could stand against the sorcerer-king.

He captured first the dwarves' healers and spellcasters before decapitating the army's head - he took the dwarven general and his lieutenants prisoner. After that, the army literally collapsed upon itself. The battle that was certain victory for the dwarves turned into a rout.

Dalan returned to his capital in glory. He had handily proven his worth as a warrior and general and the people accepted him as their ruler. Yet he never again needed to use the weapon in battle. It sat by his side as he ruled the Presstin Kingdom in relative peace for the next forty years, speaking and singing to him, imparting the wisdom of the ages and assisting him as a conduit for his magical energies. The few times he needed to dispense the justice of his army, he sent his general in his stead, a position soon filled by his son, Dalan the Younger.

Indeed, with the help of his sword, Dalan the Elder rebuilt the corrupt kingdom of his father into a rich power, one that came to rely more on knowledge and wisdom than brute force. His kingdom became a haven for wisemen, wizards and teachers, a fact that brought a new level of power and prestige to the Presstins.

When Dalan the Elder died, he was buried in a special place within the palace crypt with his sword. It is said that his son, some of the royal family and even some ministers sometimes steal away to that place of honor to listen to Dalan's sword speak and sing to them.



Sword of Darkness

This particular weapon is known by a hundred different names to a hundred different cultures: Shao'thoth, Demonblade, Sword of the Apocalypse, Kelths-Canok. All translate nearly the same: the Sword of Darkness or the Sword of Evil-Bringers.

The origins of the sword itself are almost mundane. It was forged almost six hundred years ago by the master weaponsmith Alekzandreus for a monk in the nearby female Shi'ki'tehl monastery. It was a blade of the finest craftsmanship, incredibly resilient and perfectly balanced, but it held no magical enchantment. For the next two centuries, it became a badge of honor for those within the monastery, handed down from mistress to chosen student. The blade accompanied the monks on a dozen major battles against evil, accumulating an impressive record for all those who wielded it. It never lost its edge and no monk who fought with it ever lost her life.

Until the much-feared drow of Yridraan attacked the Shi'ki'tehl, that is.

The mistress of the monastery died with the blade in her hand, killed by the wizard Kressl. He and his drow had little interest in the Shi'ki'tehl other than to destroy them, but the blade caught his eye. It was obviously a fine weapon of good make and lovingly cared for by the monks, so he took it as a spoil of war before savagely desecrating the monks' altar and setting fire to the doomed monastery.

Today all that remains of the Shi'ki'tehl is a pile of 400-year-old rubble in the Shal'tep Mountains and that sword. But the sword no longer holds the same history of honor as it once did. Now it is a foul abomination.

Kressl returned to Yridraan following the destruction of the monastery and at first used the sword simply as decoration, a trophy of his conquest. As the years passed, though, he steadily grew in power and influence, eventually becoming the most powerful wizard within the sprawling drow city of Yridraan. He gathered a large force of loyal retainers around him and as younger magic users practiced their arts under his direction, he and his closest circle of advisors began to prepare for the fight that was to come. Kressl had but one more ambition: to overthrow the matriarchal structure within Yridraan and take control for himself.

He needed a special weapon for his general, a unique symbol for his warriors to rally behind, one that would protect him from all danger and, most importantly, one that would symbolize the downfall of the matriarchs. Kressl could think of no better candidate than the sword that he plucked from the dead mistress of the female-only Shi'ki'tehl.

He spent weeks preparing the weapon, inscribing the invisible sigils and casting the enchantments into the blade. He did not adorn the weapon with any extra ornamentation – to do so would only ruin the simple beauty of the blade.

He presented his general with the weapon in a special ceremony on the eve of his assault. It could cut through almost anything, including the protection spells surrounding a drow high priestess. The only thing it could not do was harm those adorned with the mark Kressl – he was willing to take no chances.

Within two days' time Kressl and his warriors had taken control of the high priestess' palace. He gathered the surviving priestesses together within the private sanctuary to Lolth and personally executed each with the sword, leaving their hearts and entrails on the altar to his former goddess before sundering it with the sword.

That single action sent ripples throughout the pantheon. A male drow had not only dared to defy Lolth but he challenged her directly by killing her high priestess and destroying her divine altar. She instructed her loyalists within the city to rise up against this foolish male, but that only brought them out to be slaughtered by Kressl's own warriors.

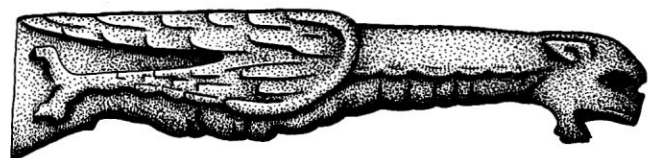
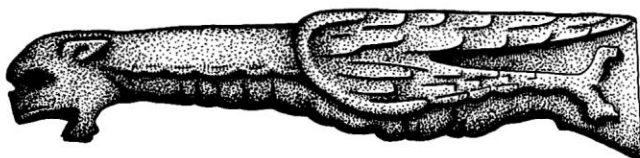
Kressl did not stop there, though. He sent his warriors door to door with instructions to destroy any image, likeness, altar to or anything else involved in the worship of the queen goddess of spiders. In one fell swoop, he radically altered the fabric of the drow civilization by eliminating the race's primary goddess from one of her largest cities.

Lolth was incensed. She ordered her faithful in other drow cities to band together and destroy Yridraan, but their every attempt was rebuffed. Kressl easily fought back every hodge-podge advance. He made alliances with other underground powers to increase the city's prestige and power base and brought in the clerics of other gods who opposed Lolth. In short, he made Yridraan a hole seat for everyone opposed to Lolth.

In the decades that followed, Lolth's followers launched attack after attack, but those only lead to the thinning of her ranks. For her part, the queen goddess of spiders did nothing but throw tirades that thinned her ranks even more. She even sent her avatar in an attempt to seduce and kill Kressl, but Kressl saw through her deceptions and dispatched her himself, again with his general's sword.

That was his undoing.

Enchanted to destroy the soul of any woman it killed, the sword drank the blood of Lolth's avatar, absorbing some of the goddess' essence. Now that the sword held a part of her, she could reach her powers across the planes to alter it, empower it with her own spells and enchant-



ments. She didn't alter it much and she took her time doing so. Her plan was simple yet insidious.

On the night of Kressl's fiftieth year in control of Yridraan, Lolth took control of his general by way of the sword. Accompanied by Lolth's avatar, the general entered Kressl's inner chamber, killed all of the guards and incapacitated the wizard - Lolth had turned the protections Kressl had placed on the sword around so that it would be most effective against those wearing his mark. When Kressl came to, he was literally caught in a web spun by the avatar. She killed him slowly over the course of the next month, ingesting him piece by piece.

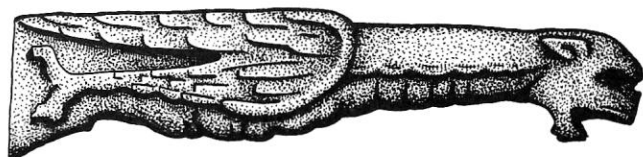
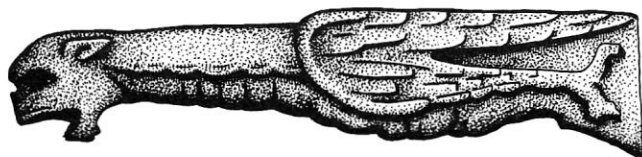
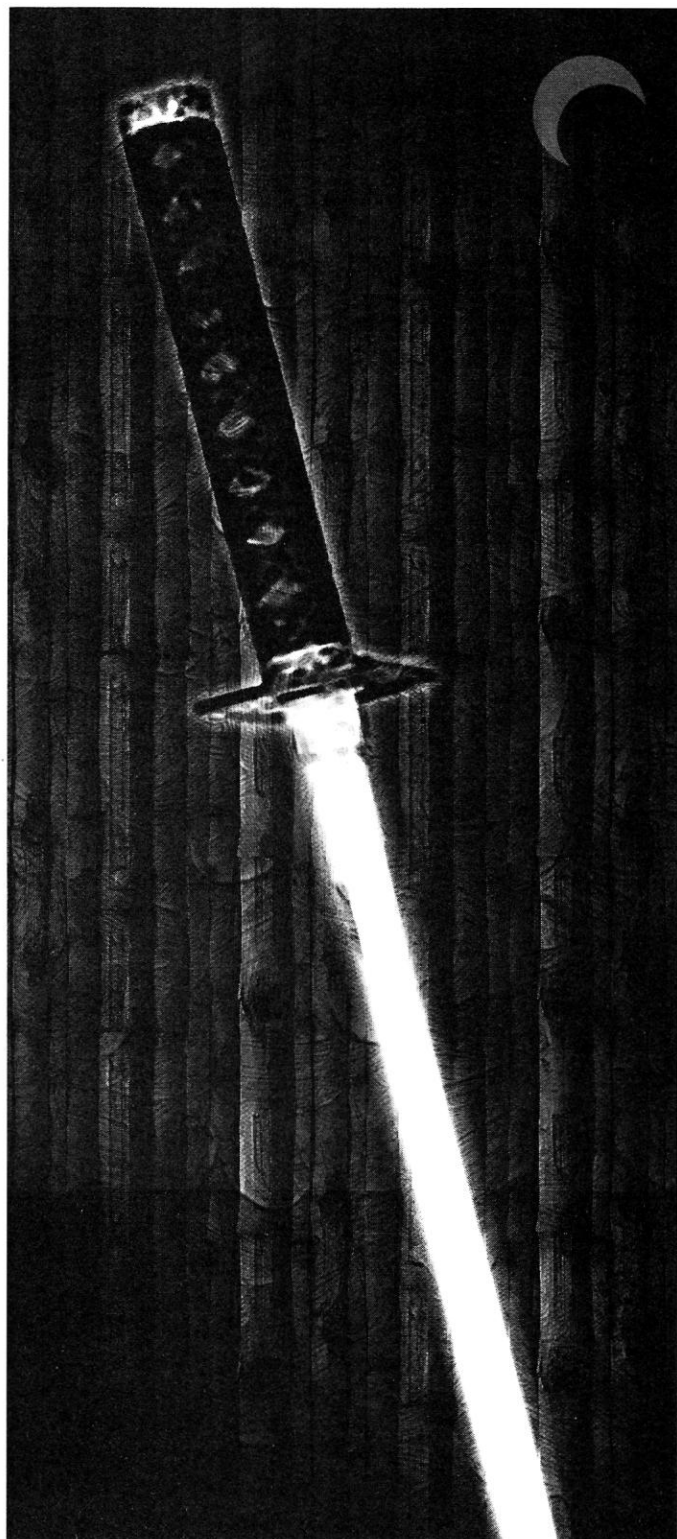
The general, still under Lolth's spell, initiated a rebellion within Kressl's house, but without the avatar to help him and guide his actions, he and the few followers he had were put down. The sword remained within Kressl's house, however, in the care of the next general of Yridraan. That man, too, fell under the spell of Lolth, as did the lieutenant who stepped up to fill his position.

The vicious cycle continued for weeks, each time a new officer took possession of Kressl's sword, he launched an attack upon the dead wizard's power structure. Finally a young sorcerer within Kressl's house saw past the history of the weapon and drove the new general, a drow named Pastesh, and his small retinue out of the city.

Pastesh soon found himself within a temple of Lolth where he met face-to-face with the goddess' avatar. He would be her avenger, armed with Shao'thoth, her sword of soul-stealing.

He served her for another hundred years before he displeased her one too many times. Since she dispatched her first avenger, four more warriors have carried Shao'thoth. All have served her every whim, questing to punish those she thinks deserved it. Some were her priestesses, women who turned their back on her or who she thought didn't pay her enough praise. Most have been male drow who have spoken out against the matriarchal system of their society or who have turned their backs on Lolth.

Xent'cal now wields Shao'thoth, as he has for the past 87 years. His name is spoken in fear by drow throughout (and under) the lands. He was a nearly unstoppable warrior even before receiving Shao'thoth from Lolth's avatar; since, he has never failed to kill a target. Shao'thoth is as sharp and strong as it was when it was forged some six centuries ago. The only mark of its age is the slightly red hue that has worked its way into the blade. Each time Lolth consumes a new soul through the sword, the blade glows ever so briefly while it absorbs the life energy and a bit of the victim's blood.



Night Terror

Each guard in the Shaken Imperial Palace is presented a personalized sword by the emperor himself upon selection to the imperial personal guard. Each of these guards is, of course, carefully selected by the head of the palace guard as well as by the emperor's prime minister. These bodyguards are expected to lay their lives down to protect the imperial family from danger, after all. As befitting

their positions, each is provided the best weapons and armor possible.

Kieren Nuchtel was one of these bodyguards, a man fanatically devoted to the empire and his emperor. To him, the gift of a sword from his emperor was a sign of trust, something he would never betray. He carried his sword with him at all times. At night, he laid it at the side of his bed, always within reach. He would not let his emperor down.

When the Shaken Imperial Guard – a legion of the emperor's best warriors – was tasked with hunting down and killing Hargrath Meissi, a warlord that had been harassing the Shaken Empire for quite a while, Kieren gladly took a temporary reassignment to the legion, looking forward to proving his worth to the empire and its leader.

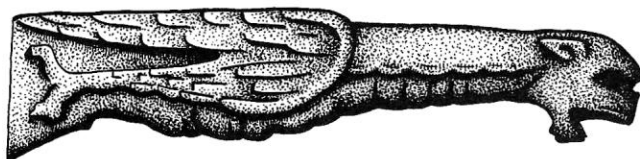
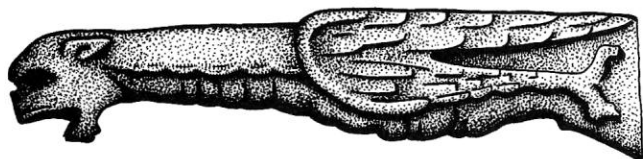
With the help of the imperial sorcerers, the Guard tracked Meissi and his raiders to a tiny keep deep in the ancient Gemmall Forest. What they found was not a raider base, however, but a refugee camp swollen with men, women and children – commoners and wealthy alike – as well as soldiers and other men of power, all having fled from the Shaken Empire.

The Guards were taken aback at the sight of so many citizens, including many of their own who were missing and presumed dead in battle, showing allegiance to a criminal. Incensed, they attacked, giving no quarter. By the end of the day, Meissi and his "raiders" were no more. Every deserter and turncoat was dead. Kieren himself dispatched Hargrath Meissi and his two top advisors.

Kieren Nuchtel did not come out of the fight unscathed, though. When his men carried him out of Meissi's keep, he was near death. The Shaken clerics tended to him for weeks, healing his body while fighting off the infections and poisons that somehow kept plaguing him; they reasoned that he had been cursed in the final moments of his battle with Meissi – there was simply no other cause they could discern.

Kieren eventually returned to duty with the palace guard in honor. The emperor himself promoted him to the imperial entourage. Instead of just serving within the palace, Kieren would accompany the emperor at all times.

But something was not quite right. Kieren began to feel guilt and regret for his part in the downfall of Meissi's raiders, feelings he never would have had before the fight. They were criminals, after all, and criminals who desert the



empire deserve nothing but death.

More than that, though, he began to sense something else. At first he thought it was nothing more than the typical unease and nervousness that any bodyguard assigned directly to the imperial court would feel, but it did not go away. Over time, it actually strengthened. More than that, the feeling would strengthen or subside depending on whether specific people were present.

Worst of all, the strongest feelings seemed to be directed at the emperor and his closest advisors.

But Kieren persevered. Not long after he returned to service, the emperor assigned Kieren to accompany his daughter as she ventured out among the people, disguised as a commoner. This was not a whimsical adventure, however. This was something required of all imperial family members. They could not hope to lead if they did not understand their own people. So, in preparation of Lady Merienne's visit to the city, Kieren too donned the clothes of a commoner and, with only the saber that the emperor had presented him when he first accepted the call to protect them, they entered the city.

Their adventure into the city became something fairy tales are made of. No one, of course, recognized either of them. Neither had ever left the palace outside of the company of others, and always had the benefit of their clothing and other accouterments to announce to everyone their station.

Without those, they both discovered a very different world.

The people were hungry, disillusioned and tired. They had no respect for the empire or its leader because, to them, they had been abandoned. Neither Merienne nor Kieren could begin to understand or explain it. They had both been hearing the same news from the imperial court, after all – there was no trouble, food was being delivered on time, there were no serious plagues and no major enemies. In short, the empire was in perfect health. Then they became ensnared in the middle of a food riot.

They escaped unharmed, but what they saw suddenly caused them to consider everything else they "knew" to be true. The once-spoiled daughter of the emperor and fanatical guardsman spent the next week learning what other "truths" were incorrect.

During that time, the two grew close. Though Merienne was beautiful, Kieren never looked at her that way. She was the emperor's daughter, after all. But he began to feel something else as soon as the two of them left the palace. The feelings he had been experiencing in the imperial court seemed to lift when she was by his side.

Yet, while they were in the city, Kieren did experience those same strong feelings from time to time. Only now he could finally begin to understand them. Here the people were not accomplished actors and liars. He knew now

that he was seeing the true face of people, what they were holding in their hearts. Merienne was innocent and beautiful – the exact opposite of her father. Though he had never told anyone else about his "gift," he shared his secret with her. Though she didn't believe it at first, during that week he had time and again caught even the best liars in their deceptions. She knew he could see the truth.

They both agreed that to disclose the entirety of their experiences in the city to the emperor would be foolish. When they returned, they told their stories with the "imperial spin." After hearing their reports, the emperor was pleased to have two more individuals that he could trust implicitly. They both were obviously devoted to the empire.

Of course, they weren't. For the next year, the two of them kept their eyes and ears open, meeting secretly to exchange information. Standing guard in the royal court and chambers, Kieren saw the most. And though his ability to see and feel the truth strengthened to the point that it was almost unbearable at times, he never once let it show.

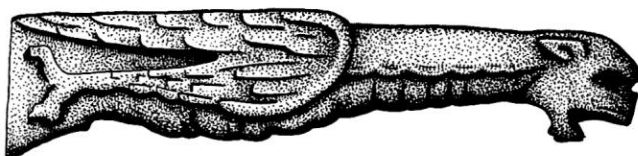
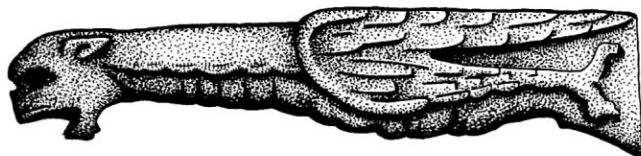
He knew why Meissi had rebelled and so many had followed him.

Kieren and Merienne knew something had to be done. The emperor and his entourage could not be allowed to continue to rule. But they were only two individuals. Even though they had recruited a few trustable souls within the palace, they did not have enough to stage a coup.

So they did the only thing that they could.

One night Kieren slipped into the imperial suite and, using the saber that the emperor had given him so long ago, executed his ruler. He did the same to the prime minister and the chief advisor. Leaving behind a sheaf of documents implicating every member of the imperial court in one crime or another, Kieren and Merienne stole away into the darkness. In their wake, the palace erupted into a firestorm of violence as ministers fought to bring down their enemies while simultaneously forming powerful enough alliances to protect themselves. The only decision that all agreed upon were the death warrants for Kieren Nuchtel and Lady Merienne.

That was years ago. Though hundreds have searched for Kieren Nuchtel and his wife, hoping to win the literal kingly bounty on their heads, none has yet succeeded in bringing these fugitives in. Over the years, Kieren has devoted his existence to avenging the wrongs of the Shaken Empire, meting out death sentences in the deep of the night to those who most deserve them. Not only is he a warrior of the highest virtue and skill, but with Night Terror – his saber – in his hand, he can almost literally read the minds of his foes. That is why, of course, there is a 50,000 gp bounty on his head alone.



Skyfire

-from the annals of Orinel

Saarindrar

Two score and twelve cycles into the reign of Drebbar the Lesser over the city-state of Orinel, the goddess Ageluca became enraged at the conduct of the people within the city-state of Saarindrar. Ageluca watched over them in their times of need. She provided them crops and animals, kind weather and moderate winds. She seduced Pellorr so that he would shine upon them even when he refused his gift to his own faithful. Ageluca gave the people of Saarindrar what they wanted and needed, but they did not rejoice in her name. They turned their back on her. They erected temples to other gods. They cast away their likenesses of her and drove her priests away.

Ageluca did not understand their behavior. Her last remaining faithful had been driven from the city, so she went there herself. She took on the guise of her people and walked the land with her bare feet. No one who looked at her knew who she was, as she desired it.

She asked the guard when she came to the gate, "where is the temple of Ageluca, that I might worship her after my long journey."

"Weary traveler," he answered, "do not bow down to that god for she is weak and cares not for us. I will show you to the temple of Cyrenx. He will watch over you."

"Thank you for your kindness," Ageluca responded, "but I should like to find the temple of Ageluca."

The gate guard shook his head. "You will not find a temple to that god in this city. Cyrenx has forbidden all within the city from worshipping her. Do not break our god's will by defying him."

Ageluca hid her disappointment. "Do not fear the wrath of Cyrenx for I will not worship Ageluca here. Please allow me to enter, fair man, for I am tired from my long journey."

After she entered Saarindrar, Ageluca went from street to street looking for any of her faithful, but all she found was disappointment. She knew Cyrenx and his evil ways. He had stolen the city from her and had doomed its people. No one in the city still praised her for her generosity or even remembered her. She grew angry.

Standing in the temple of Cyrenx, she threw down her mask and stood before the people she had loved for so long in her full glory. "Have I not always cared for you?" she asked. "Have you not prospered under my love? And how do you respond? You destroy my likenesses. You desecrate my altars. You kill and drive off my prophets and worship that which is evil. Prepare now for my judgment."

Her presence had drawn the entire city to the temple of Cyrenx and when she disappeared, she left them wondering. Some laughed at her while others prayed to the likeness of Cyrenx. But when they looked to the sky, they knew the depth of Ageluca's anger. The sun became dark. Clouds roiled. The earth shook. But then the clouds seemed to glow with fire.

Then she had her wrath.

A tremendous ball of fire struck the temple of Cyrenx, sundering the earth, crumbling the city and setting fire to its ruins. She did not spare the countryside, either. What was once fertile and green turned to ash in an instant. Her wrath was so great that cities days away from Saarindrar could see the glow of her wrath consuming the ruins of the city.

The people who had turned their backs on her were no more.

That was not the end of Ageluca's wrath, though. She went to her few remaining faithful, those who fled Saarindrar and survived the wilds, and told them to return to their city.

When they returned, the lands were black and the city flattened. In the center of the city, they found a hole where the temple of Cyrenx was, and in the center of the hole was a great adamantine rock, still warm from the fire.

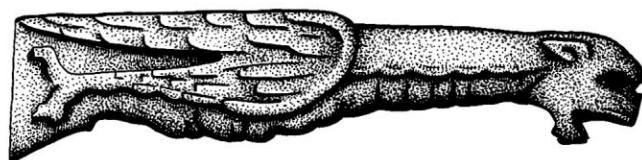
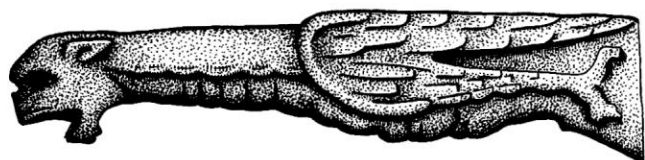
Ageluca told them to build a new city on the ashes of those who turned away from her and to forge weapons and armor from the adamantine rock to use against those who would try to stop them.

So they built a new temple around the great smoking hole, measuring...

Skyfire

Skyfire was the second sword to come from Ageluca's rock, twelve hand spans long, the blade is guarded in gold with a mahogany grip. Forged from the adamantine of Ageluca's rock, it is unbreakable and shall never dull. Touched by Ageluca herself, it speaks for her, relaying her will to her servants. It can sense the presence of her enemies and can unerringly smite them. But it is not only for punishing those who turned away from her. Skyfire can light the way for her faithful, allowing them to tell all of the power and glory of Ageluca.

Jarl Folvaard was the first to wield Skyfire. He traveled the length and breadth of the lands, searching for those who would worship Cyrenx. In his journeys, he came upon many who had never heard of Ageluca. To those who would listen, he would speak of her. When he came upon followers of Cyrenx, he delivered nothing but death. Fourteen fell to Skyfire within the first rise and fall of the moon Draan. Two score more fell over the next full cycle, but that was just the beginning for Jarl and Skyfire.



Freinda

Two cycles after Ageluca smote Saarindrar, she called upon her faithful to gather together. They would travel to the far city of Freinda where Cyrenx had gathered his own most faithful together and exact Ageluca's wrath. They traveled for three score and nine days and nights to Freinda. But Cyrenx's faithful had already locked the gates. They repulsed every attack upon the gates.

"Why don't you rain fire down upon this city as you did on Saarindrar?" Ageluca's faithful asked.

"Because not all of them follow Cyrenx," she said. "Would you have me punish those who have not done wrong? No. Appeal to them and they will help you."

So Ageluca's faithful surrounded the city, loudly proclaiming the bounty of their god. They did so for ten days, each morning and evening saying prayers to their god before telling the people of Freinda of her.

On the eleventh day, their prayers were answered. A boy came running to them from behind them. "I am Nostarr. I have listened to you speak of Ageluca for ten days. I have tried to convince my parents that you are correct, but they say that we should follow Cyrenx. I will lead you into the city to bring word of Ageluca so that all of us can revel in her glory."

And so that night Nostarr brought them to a secret tunnel and lead them into the heart of the city.

The Temple of Cyrenx

Ageluca's most faithful fought for a fortnight within the city, leaving Cyrenx's temple for last. Already many of Cyrenx's faithful had fallen, but scores remained within the temple. Outside, those who had spurned Cyrenx, and thus had been spared the blade, blared trumpets to Ageluca as they walked through the streets of blood. Inside the temple, the forces of the two gods battled. Many on both sides fell.

Jarl, Skyfire, and Nostarr

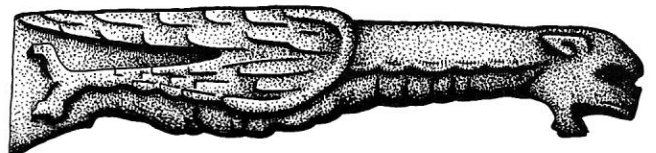
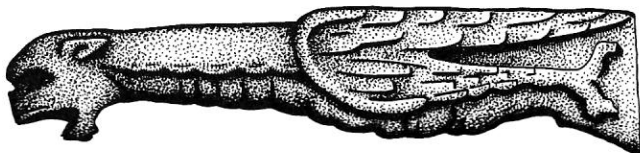
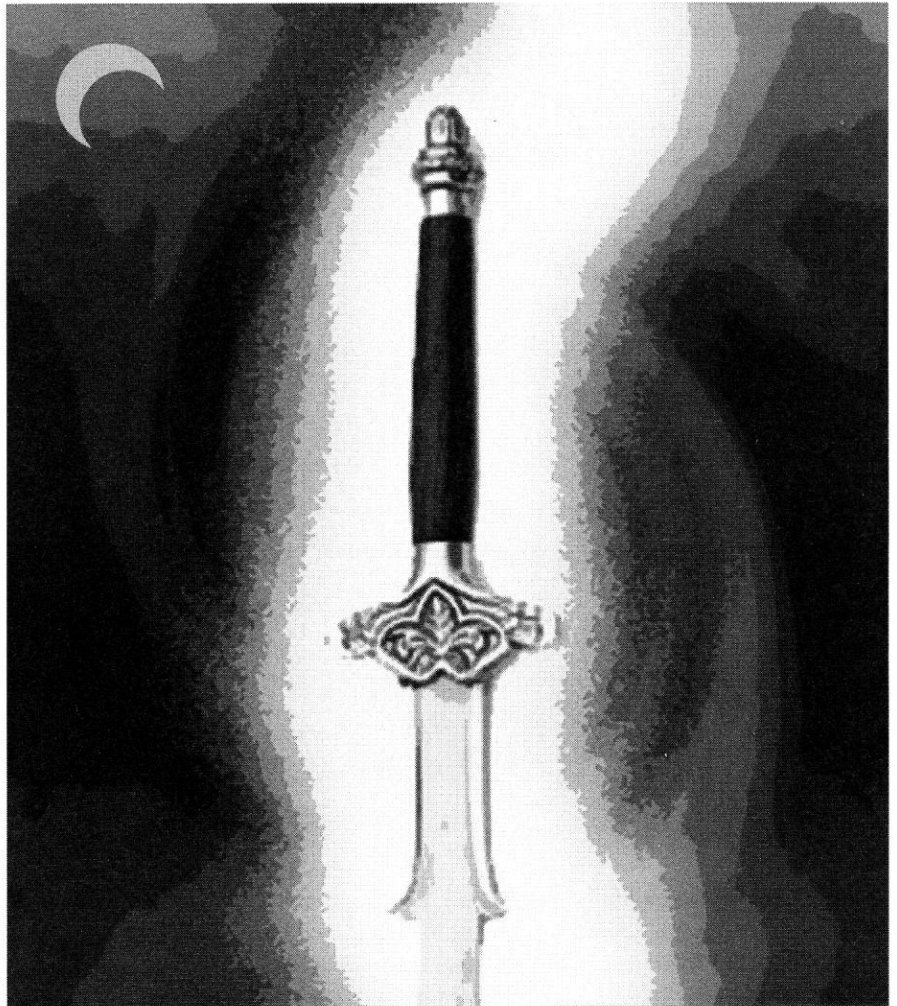
Jarl and Nostarr, whom he had taken for an apprentice, entered the temple of Cyrenx with the rest of Ageluca's most faithful. Though just a boy, Nostarr fought alongside the men who had survived Saarindrar. Ageluca had blessed him with her approval and, through Skyfire, instructed Jarl to teach him the ways of a warrior. Soon, he became her most

favorable warrior.

Though Skyfire was powerful, Jarl fell to the poison arrow of the high priest of Cyrenx. Nostarr picked up Skyfire and wielded it as another limb. That night the battle for the temple was over. Nostarr himself slew the high priest and priestess of Cyrenx. "You may be my mother and father," he said, "but Ageluca provides for me."

Nostarr

Nostarr the Brave now wields Skyfire, as he has for two score and four cycles. Not only does he deliver the wrath of Ageluca to her enemies, he also brings her love and her name to those who need it the most. He resides in the temple of Ageluca in the city-state of Agella, once-known as Saarindrar.



Advis

"Advis was the first of three blades constructed by Nazden the White. It is clear from historical records of Master Nazden that he hoped to use the magic of the blades in concert during his own explorations. Advis (literally meaning 'unto strength') was constructed to make the wizard more powerful in those rare situation where physical confrontation was unavoidable. In keeping with Master Nazden's own personal arcane preferences, the dagger of strength was gifted with the power of fire. Viewing this element as the most powerful, Nazden preferred its use on his most aggressive weapon.

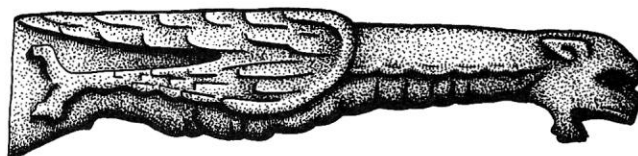
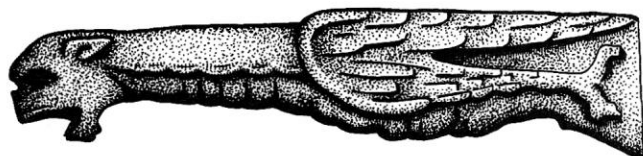
"Master Nazden constructed two other weapons immediately following Advis. They were Pernix and Fortis, and each was enchanted in its own way to enhance the wizard's physical abilities. Though Nazden has few opportunities to use his creations during his life, there is some evidence to suggest that he favored the use of the blade Pernix. The dagger of agility seemed primarily to be a defensive device, which Nazden used to protect himself while relying on his magic for attack.

"Master Nazden ironically lost his life not during the adventures for which he prepared, but while at rest in his home. A band of thieves broke into his home. When Nazden awoke and tried to confront them, he was slain. Every item of any significance or value was taken, includ-

ing Advis, Pernix, and Fortis. The blades were separated almost immediately, and only a brief journal entry purported to have been written by one of the thieves provides any reasonable explanation:

"We scored some knives along with the rest of the take. Real handy when you're against a wall, and these in particular seemed to have a real force to them. At first, I thought my dagger was nothing special, but it started talking to me. I thought maybe I'd lost my head, but I didn't think so. The thing had a mind of its own, and a name too. Called itself 'Advis'. I don't trust weapons that can think for themselves. Never can tell what they're going to do when you're in the dark. So I sold it for quite a little sum. But not before it'd started telling me stories about itself, its master, and its brothers. The sort of stuff that would keep you from sleeping on a cold night. It sounded like a spoiled child - wanted to be daddy's favorite. I don't think the wizard being dead bothered the thing. It seemed happy to have the chance to revenge some insults. I don't think it liked its brothers much."

"Advis clearly resented the other two daggers of the set, and it seems to have set out from the beginning to destroy the others. In this way it might have claimed sole inheritance of the legacy of Master Nazden's greatness. Or, as the journal suggested, it may simply have felt wronged by the other blades and sought vengeance.



"Whatever the particulars of the cause, Advis set out on a definite course. It sought word of Pernix—probably because the dagger of agility was Nazden's favorite. When Advis and his wielder came within reach of Pernix, a battle ensued. Nothing can verify whether Advis itself or its wielder was in control during the battle. The outcome, however, seems to suggest an answer. At the end of that fateful encounter, Advis had been used to destroy Pernix. The dagger of agility was left with a broken blade and its magic was destroyed utterly. The man who had wielded Pernix was left alive, though he never gave a useful account of his time with the weapon.

"After Pernix' destruction, Advis sought Fortis. The dagger of strength at first made use of the same wielder who had helped it destroy Pernix. As time passed, however, Advis began to change hands quickly, passing from one wielder to the next as if determined to discover the whereabouts of Fortis by questioning everyone within its reach.

"It is from this time of hunting that the best accounts of Advis' temperament are found. As it grew more desperate in its search, the dagger of strength was less and less cautious. Against those wielders whose wills were too strong for the dagger to overcome, Advis was forced to use reason and arguments. It was forced to explain itself, to tell the tales of Advis, Pernix, and Fortis. Some of the brief wielders of Advis left records of what it had told them.

"Principle in Advis' account of events is the jealousy of its brothers. Pernix and Fortis, it claims, grew jealous of Advis' power. As they were afraid of old Master Nazden, however, neither acted against the dagger of strength until their creator was dead. Thus freed, Advis explained, it knew that its weaker, envious brothers would seek a way to destroy it and claim its power for themselves."

Advis claimed many times that it and its brothers could communicate empathically. They could threaten and hunt one another by feeling alone. Because of this empathic knowledge, Advis explained, it could never truly hide from its brothers. They would always be able to track it down in time. It went on to explain that it always desired peace—after all, it had no desire to use up its magical powers in constant battle. Pernix, however, could not abide being second best.

"Even after Advis knew Pernix hunted it, the dagger of strength explains that it tried to remain peaceful and hide, but this could never be enough. In the end, Pernix discovered Advis and the two were forced into battle. Advis' wielder, knowing that the source of the threat was Pernix' jealousy, acted against the dagger of agility. Advis claims that the destruction of Pernix was not something that it wanted, but it does now feel safer that one of its brothers is gone.

"Shortly after Pernix' destruction, Advis has stated, it began to feel the threats of Fortis. Advis feared that its brother would seek revenge for Pernix' death, or that Fortis, too, had grown jealous. Thus, Advis explained, it hoped to find its brother and calm the heated emotions between them. It only wants to talk openly with its brother, to repair the rift of mistrust and hatred that exists between them.

"Few who have heard the tales Advis told actually believe them. The dagger of strength has desperation about its search that speaks of an unsound mind. Perhaps Advis speaks the truth. For that, none but the blades of Nazden may ever know.

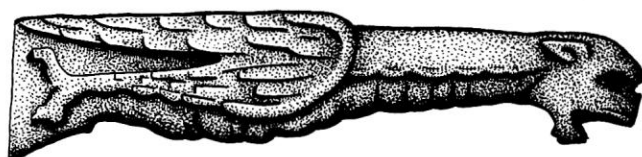
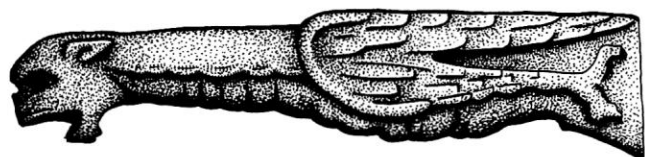
"After a time, Advis' frenzied search slowed. It must have realized that it made no progress and turned to other means. Despite Advis' change of pace or manner, however, its search did continue. Advis clung to its wielders for years, and urged each to explore and adventure, much as Master Nazden once did. It sought forgotten dungeons and hidden enclaves, perhaps believing that Fortis had hidden in such a place.

"After untold years of such adventures, Advis disappeared. Sages aware of the history of the blades of Nazden commonly agree that Advis lost its wielder in some ancient tomb or lair, and that the dagger of strength lies in such a place still. Most admit the possibility that Advis was taken by a master of strong will and that the dagger was unable to break free when it chose.

"Only one unconfirmed tale would contradict these beliefs. This story claims that Advis was lured into the wilderness by false rumors of Fortis. It went, of course, with its wielder. Upon reaching the deep forest, Advis encountered a grove of dryads. The fey creatures bespelled Advis' wielder and caused him to wander through the forest, lost, for several weeks. The dagger of strength was taken by the roots of an ancient oak and buried at the heart of the grove, so that it might cause no more harm.

"The story exists as a rumor, told by adventurers who claim to have been given the truth of it by fey creatures of the wilderness. As neither adventurers nor fey, however, are known for their reliability and honesty, the story cannot be given much credence. The little believability that can be assigned to the tale comes from an uncertain but similar story connected with the dagger Fortis. (the reader is referred to the sixth chapter of this volume, where Fortis is described)."

Arcane Forge and Mystic Fire: a History of the Magical Armaments of Five Centuries, Master Tai-Shalar Maelus, 798



Terran Blade

"...where it remains in safety.

"Also left behind was the Terran Blade, a straight-bladed, double-edged short sword with a translucent crystal hilt. A study of the blade by Master Torris revealed a variety of potent magical effects. Many of these effects seem to derive directly from the enchanted crystal that makes up the sword's hilt. These abilities included the creation of a directed ground tremor as well as limited divinations and physical protections. These powers seem generally in line with Master Detheran's other creations of defensive and informational nature. Master Torris' investigations also revealed that the Terran Blade contained some rudimentary intelligence, though he was unable to establish direct communication with the weapon. The Terran Blade was confiscated by the Tiallan baronial officials and sent to the baronial treasury at Kyallas following Master Torris' investigations.

"The Rod of Aether, a two and a half foot device constructed of an unknown smoky, opaque material, was kept in..."

Known Wizards and Thaumaturgical Studies of Fifth Century North Hilbred, Master Kairen Joseph Alaban, 524

"...to seek their fortunes preying upon civilized nations.

"The sudden attack of numerous barbarian forces often led neighboring states to rally military resources of unprecedented size and nature. The barony of Tiallas was interesting in its reaction to such dangers. The local guardsmen were mustered, of course, and joined by volunteers. Instead of overpowering by numbers, however, the baron chose to use magic. Drawing from the treasures across the barony, he issued weapons and armor of a magical nature from his stores. It is a common misconception that Baron Tiallas handed these magical advantages to as many soldiers as could carry them. A more realistic view is that only officers and experienced soldiers received such boons, particularly those of gentle or noble birth.

"It was not merely a matter of generosity. After the barbarian incursion had been stopped, a number of Baron Tiallas' magical treasures were found missing — whether borne by lost soldiers and taken by barbarians or simply stolen by his own men. Baron Tiallas was not unprepared for this eventuality. He produced ledgers which described each device and its known powers and to whom they were appointed before the battles. For each item not returned, the baron laid a fine on the individual or surviving families. In the end, this means accounted for a significant surplus of gold coin from the wealthiest families in the barony. The total revenues produced in this

manner have been estimated as anything from fifty thousand to as much as three hundred thousand. The money was not merely collected in coin, of course. Lands and assets were accepted as recompense, and in this way did baronial treasuries actually increase during a time of financial and political uncertainty.

"A full accounting of those items and nobility lost is not..."

Beasts, Monsters, and Barbarians: A Study of Danger and its Effects on Civilized Lands, Master Nollaren Michael Telbess, 682

"In the seventh sun of the hawk, Erem turned his eyes from the people. The hall of the sky grew dark with sorrow and rage, and heavy tears fell from the heavens. The signs of war brought the people forward, and they swept over the tall stones as a cleansing flame. Blood burned hot and flowed on the open ground, and the people thought they were blessed.

"The battle was rich and the bounty plentiful. When the tall stones had fallen, the people flowed back to their home as a river to sea. In this time of victory and joy, the Wise told all that Erem beheld them not. His curse was upon the people, and they knew fear.

"From the spoils of the storm came the foul breath. A test for the strong, Erem slew the weak. The hawk fell from the sky, and the Wise found the way. All the spoils of storm must be purged to end the curse.

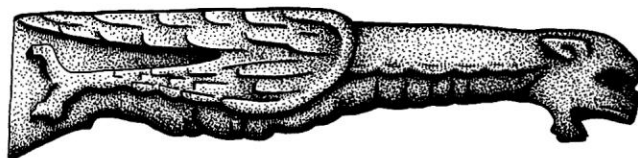
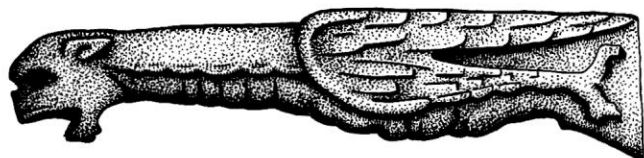
"The courage of Erem showed the people how to face their heart. The gifts of Erem are laid on the river, and the water washes the people clean. Hearts are pure and the air of death passes from the lands under the dark sky. Erem smiles on his people again, and the people knew victory."

Translated from *Song of the Hawk*

"...survived the last days of the ravaging disease.

"Lord Lamreth issued many open-ended decrees in an effort to cease the spread of the disease, of course. No mundane efforts, however, seemed capable of ceasing the advance. Isolation, magical healing, and even summary executions failed to halt or slow the spread of lung fever. The intervention of arcane and divine magic did, however, identify a particular and singular source. The divinations of Lord Lamreth's most honored advisors indicated a single magical cause of the plague. They also noted a malevolent intelligence behind the thorough contamination. More details could not be provided, not even with the most potent spells known.

"It was a long winter, in which many hundreds or thousands died from lung fever, before any more information was to become clear. The auguries revealed that the cause of the epidemic was now somewhere to the east, and





cause of the plague. Even after his triumphant return, he seemed moody and unhappy at times. In such times, it is said, he brooded over his failure at his quest to destroy the source of the epidemic. Some have supposed that the true source of his displeasure was the death of his true love from lung fever, but this is certainly pure fancy as the nobles and gentry of..."

A History of the Barony of Tiallas (incomplete), Allumet Petrandia, 887

"...with the disappearance of another victim.

"Similar in intent is the short sword known as the Terran Blade, the Crystal Fang, or the Claw of Death. A straight-bladed sword with a crystal hilt, this weapon appears by all arcane divinations to be a potent weapon designed to divine hidden things and protect its bearer. It is clearly possessed of intelligence—as can be determined by persistent investigations. The blade, of course, will only speak if it chooses and it seems to prefer silence. Through divine communion, the Terran Blade has been identified as the ultimate source of at least twelve known plagues.

"In addition to the potent force of its malevolent magic, the Terran Blade has the potential in itself to cause significant damage to a healthy society. As has been determined with the Mithril

apparently moving away. Clearly, Lord Lamreth declared, this malevolence knew it would be destroyed and now fled. He chose to demonstrate his courage and honor by ordering his son, the young Lord Kaiven, on a quest to find and destroy this source of evil. Lord Kaiven gathered his armsmen and headed east. On the trail, Lord Kaiven seemed to be following a lone figure bearing only a crystal-hilted short sword. While he could not catch this creature on the road, local peasants in those lands informed him of an evil presence...

"...he found himself facing the creature he had been told must be the source of the evil. With some horror, Lord Kaiven realized this monster must be none other than a lich. Immediately, he set to destroy the creature...

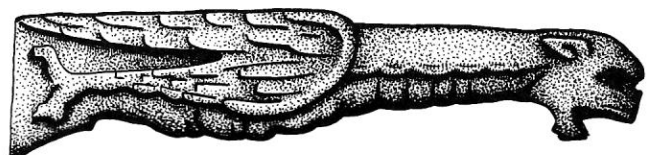
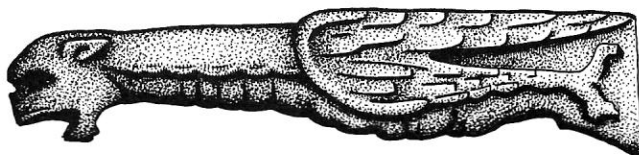
"...the corruption and destroy it.

"Despite the many treasures reclaimed from the lair, however, Lord Kaiven never found the crystal-hilted sword and was convinced that he had not found the true

Belt, this weapon seems to have a peculiar intelligence dedicated to the eradication of all living things of merit. It acts with impunity to petrify those who interfere with its designs and brings pestilence on those unlucky enough to even be near it. The disease lies dormant in its victims for a time, spreading even further before it shows its effects. Always, in the end, comes slow and agonizing death.

"Events such as these plagues, the incident caused by the Rod of Aether, and the damage done to livestock and crops by the Diamond Wheel amulet, must lead the Council of Three to declare the creations of Master Detheran as anathema. His intent, if not true evil, is at least beyond comprehension. Clearly his remaining artifacts act as de facto agents of the dark powers. Their works must be ended and their magics undone.

From the address of Bryon of Eastlake, Cleric of the Third Rose, to the assembled Council of Three, 1001



Fortis

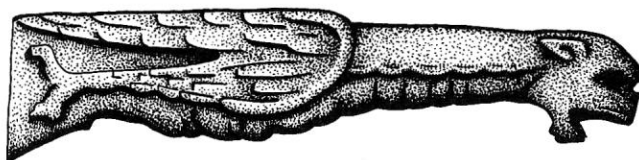
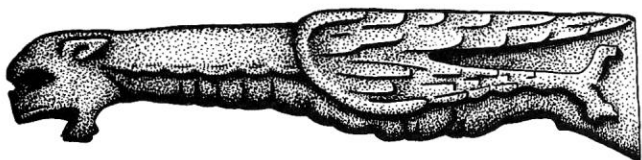
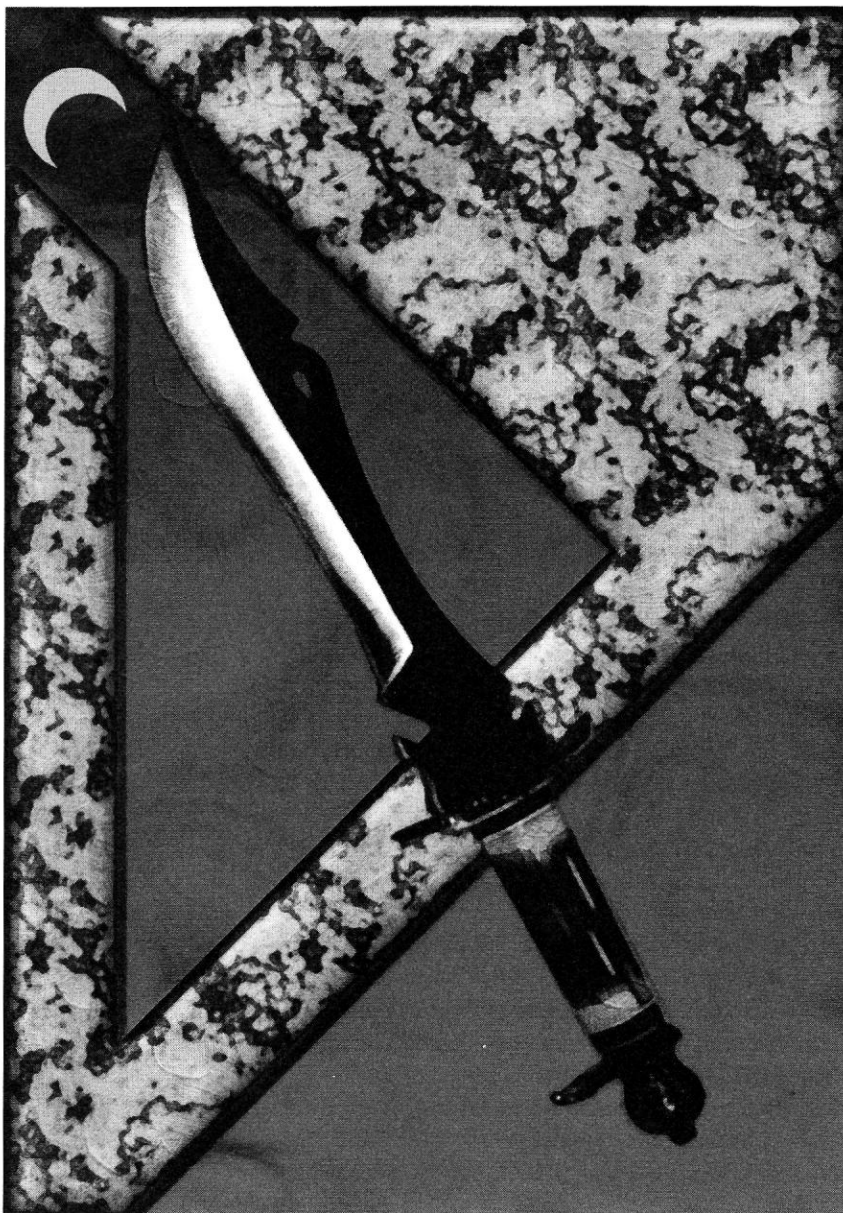
"Fortis was the final blade of the three constructed by the Nazden the White. Master Nazden intended to bear these daggers as a means of enhancing his physical abilities during his adventures. Fortis specifically was designed to increase Master Nazden's endurance, resistance to pain and fatigue, and to provide useful protective magics. In addition, each of the three daggers was enchanted with the essence of a particular element. Fortis was gifted with the power of cold. Whether this choice held some special significance in Master Nazden's eyes or not has never been determined.

"The first daggers constructed were Advis and Pernix, the blades of strength and speed. From remaining records, it seems Master Nazden preferred to rely on the abilities of Pernix, though he also kept Fortis available to enhance his ability to endure combat. In this way, Master Nazden could use his enchanted weapons to protect himself more readily and use his own spells for offense.

"Master Nazden was eventually killed in his home, and most of his belongings were stolen. Advis, Pernix, and Fortis were separated immediately, and each followed its own path through the world. While Advis seemed to set about the purposeful destruction of its 'brothers' (the reader is referred to the entry of Advis in the first chapter of this volume), Fortis appears to have focused instead on protecting and empowering itself. Whether this preference was established in reaction to aggressions by its brother blade Advis or simply by its own nature is uncertain.

"While Advis was determinedly pursuing Pernix, Fortis found itself in the hands of an experienced burglar and adventurer, Simon of Threestone. Simon's line of work often brought him into danger from traps and poisons, but he rarely caught the sight of other civilized creatures. This trait appears to have been an advantage that Fortis enjoyed. From the lack of records and the intelligence generally possessed by the daggers of Nazden, I can only assume that Fortis attempted to purposefully hide itself in anonymity. If it's wielder did not draw the attention of other people, the dagger itself could not readily be found.

"The first real historical reference proving Fortis' location comes shortly after the time of Pernix' destruction. Simon of Threestone was captured by baronial troops and held on charges of burglary. Simon's fate is not specifically named, but a dagger matching Fortis' description was listed among the prisoner's belongings. Fortis, at least, and probably his other personal effects were seized by local authorities and given to the chamberlain for disposal. The capture of the skilled thief and the unusual dagger in his possession may have come to Advis' attention. It is known that the dagger of strength was traded among several individuals within the same city at the time Simon was captured. It seems likely, given Advis' pattern of movements, that it suspected Fortis was near but failed to locate its brother.



"Fortis, meanwhile, came into the possession of a knight of noble birth, Lord Ian De'Mourlan. This is known for certainty only because some years later, the dagger Fortis was discovered in Lord De'Mourlan's tomb. From earlier stories of his life, however, his use for the dagger of endurance can be identified.

"Lord De'Mourlan ventured on several quests to rid his lands of magical beasts. In these tales, he is poetically described as wielding the power of fire and ice. Fortis, then, must have provided the power of ice to his attacks. In addition, Lord De'Mourlan suffered from periodic bouts of uncertainty when, according to his closest advisors, he lacked confidence in himself and grew more reserved around those he did not know personally. This may be due to Fortis' influence.

"The dagger of endurance is quite intelligent and bears its own distinct personality. It seems determined, through whatever means, to ensure that it is kept and valued. It protects its bearer, but it also has a curse. That is, Fortis convinces its wielder that they are strong and safe only with Fortis. Due to this fault, those who carry Fortis for any length of time begin to draw away from others and lose some of their own force of will and self-confidence.

"Lord De'Mourlan's response to this curse seems to have been to rely upon his advisors. He trusted their judgment when he felt he could not trust his own, and when his doubts grew too great, he retreated into solitude to recover. Once left to himself and given bed rest, he seemed quite capable of overcoming the dagger's curse—at least for a short time. During his more confident and able phases, he continued his adventurous career and managed to accomplish several major services for his people.

"Lord De'Mourlan survived the only two attempts on his life. His would-be assassins tainted his food with a virulent poison on the first attempt, but it is suspected that Fortis' enhancements allowed him to survive the danger. The second attempt was more direct. A lone assassin crept into Lord De'Mourlan's chambers but his victim awoke before his task could be accomplished. It seems likely that Fortis, as an intelligent and aware device capable of its own action, prevented his demise on this occasion as well by alerting the sleeping nobleman. This second assassin died during his failed attempt.

"When Lord De'Mourlan died, it was of simple infirmity and old age. His armor and weapons were sealed with him in his tomb. It must have seemed to Fortis that it would be kept there for many years, but there is no evidence that the dagger of endurance objected to being buried with Lord De'Mourlan. Perhaps Fortis believed it would be safer from Advis if buried in the tomb that left to wander the world.

"Fortis was not left in the tomb for more than two

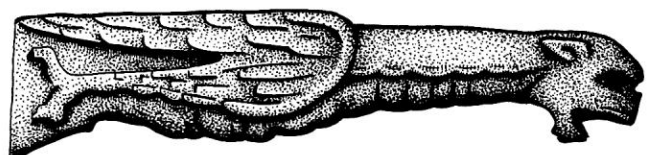
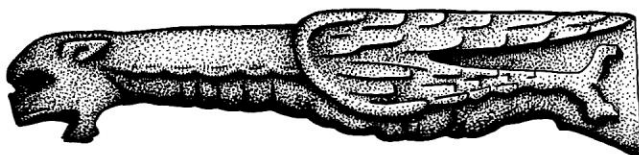
years. Grave robbers entered the tomb and stole many of Lord De'Mourlan's treasures. Fortis, being intelligent and capable of speech, drew the attention of the thieves. It has been confirmed in the journal of Helmeth the thief that while they searched the tomb, a voice spoke to them and told them to take the weapons of Lord De'Mourlan and to use them for no evil. There can be no doubt but that this voice was Fortis.

"Helmeth himself bore Fortis out of the tomb, and his journal describes several adventures he undertook with the assistance of the dagger of endurance. Also from his writings, it can be surmised that he was subjected to similar lapses in confidence that caused him to withdraw from his fellows. These episodes seemed to be less of a concern to Helmeth than they were to Lord De'Mourlan. It must be admitted, however, that the only source of information for such a conclusion is Helmeth himself, and he was noticeably lacking in objectivity.

"In time, Helmeth was separated from Fortis. His journal does not describe the particular circumstances of the parting, but it does note explicitly that Fortis was given to a woodsman of Helmeth's acquaintance. From this point, only somewhat unreliable verbal accounts remain. Fortis was taken by the woodsman back to his home, though the specific location is a mystery.

"The woodsman has been described as an adventurer himself, if the accounts describe the same woodsman that was given Fortis. He was known to travel with an elven druid named Therinos Stardew. About two years after Helmeth parted with Fortis, an account of Therinos describes him as bearing a horn-handled dagger of ice. It seems likely that this dagger was Fortis. Therinos is never described as having suffered from episodes of withdrawal, but it is possible that, as a druid, he could have used his magic to offset the negative effects of the dagger of endurance.

"The last tale that may involve Fortis describes an encounter between Therinos Stardew and a grove of dryads. Therinos approached the dryads at the behest of a friend. He asked a favor of them, specifically that they would entomb a device of evil. There is no direct evidence to suggest who the friend might have been, or what evil could have been indicated. The distinct possibility exists, however, that the friend was Fortis itself, and the evil to be entombed was Fortis' brother, Advis. If this is the case then the dagger of strength may even now lie buried beneath the encircling roots of a dryad's oak. Perhaps, then, Fortis has found a way to keep itself safe for all time. Or, Advis may yet be free and still pursuing the dagger of endurance. Whether free or entombed, however, it can readily be surmised that both daggers will represent a threat to one another until at least one is destroyed."



Serpent Fang

"In this, the matter of judgment on Paloight of Two-Hills, the council of the Crystal Hall has heard argument and evidence. Paloight, being a student of the Hall for the requisite 10 years and two, sits now before his elders. The findings of the Council of the Hall are these:

"Upon his arrival, Paloight of Two-Hills began his tenure as student showing some promise and ability in the Art and Craft of Wizardry. Paloight, as a student, showed an aptitude and interest in the study of the Energies of Fear and Death. These interests and studies, deemed unhealthy by the Masters of the Hall, are denied to those wizards and students of incomplete training. Paloight acted contrary to the Orders, Agreements, and Will of the Masters of the Hall in pursuing these subjects prior to his acceptance in the Ninth Order.

"This unfortunate breach of protocol and appropriate restraint has been met with serious penalties. These penalties may include additional obligations, restricted privileges, fines, confiscation of improper materials, and at their most severe suspension of access and studies. In the matter of Paloight of Two-Hills, his Masters have established a series of penalties, obligations, restrictions, and fines that successfully eliminated all evidence of improper conduct.

"It is the advised opinion of this Council that contrary to appearances and evidence, Paloight continued his inappropriate studies against the advice and will of his Masters. Furthermore, in the process of this serious misconduct, Paloight compounded his negligent behavior by concealing the extent and seriousness of his activities. At the end of his apprentice studies and in a clear miscarriage of benevolent intent, Paloight of Two-Hills was admitted into the Ninth Order in good standing.

"At the time of his admittance, Paloight of Two-Hills no longer faced the restraints placed against the study of necromantic arts. His manner and modes were clearly set, however, and he continued to conceal all evidence of his ill-advised studies. Furthermore, he was allowed the responsibility of instructing new apprentices about their tasks and basic magic, as is the due obligation of all members of the Ninth Order. It can only be assumed that Paloight, in a disgraceful and shocking lack of compassion and forethought, used his duties as opportunities to convince others to follow his ill-chosen path.

"In his additional duties and errands, as determined and issued by the Masters and Council of the Hall, Paloight was commanded as many students are to travel to other islands on the business of and in the interests of the Crystal Hall. While the elders of the Hall are aware of and tolerate a certain degree of latitude and negotiation

among students for preferable travel, it is clear that Paloight kept with him a singular purpose. The evidence admitted as a reconstruction of Paloight's travels, studies, and correlation between his preferred locales and sites of evil magics cannot be ignored.

"It is clear that Paloight of Two-Hills intentionally neglected his assigned tasks to a degree that allowed him to contact abominations, priests of dark gods, and the worst pariahs among wizards. Furthermore, his studies establish a pattern of interest in those items, devices, and places that could be used to increase the individual power of necromancy. These activities, while not strictly illegal, are anathema to the interests of the Crystal Hall.

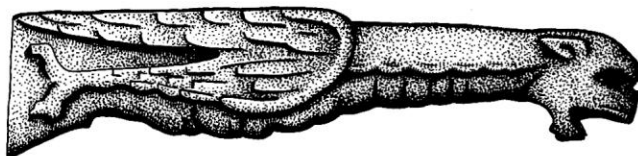
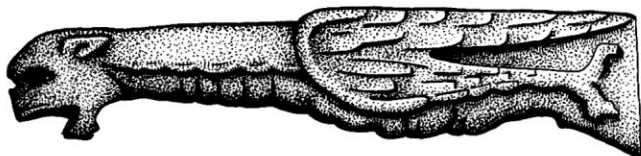
"Furthermore, Paloight's efforts at causing others to succumb to the same weaknesses from which he suffered met with some success. The student Elsen of Greenborough, within a year of studying under Paloight's tutelage began to show similar unhealthy interests in dark magics. The Council must consider any such corruption of young minds and able students to be tantamount to betrayal of the Hall itself.

"The matter of Elsen of Greenborough was settled by his Masters of the Hall, and he appeared to rescind his darker interests and pursue a more natural program of study. In consideration of later events, however, it becomes clear that Paloight continued his unethical behaviors and connived or intimidated the younger Elsen to continue as has been argued. When Elsen's body was discovered, it was marked with the study of necromantic wizardry of the darkest sort and left perhaps with the hope of reanimation or extra-corporeal abilities.

"If the evidence against Paloight of Two-Hills could be made more compelling, he would instead be given to the civil authorities for appropriate punishment. As it stands, the efficiency with which he obscured facts and evidence prevents certainty in the matter. His association with Elsen of Greenborough, however, combined with his own history of dark interests, neglect of due responsibilities, and desire for personal gain and power at the expense of fellow students and wizards have convinced the Council of the Hall.

"We believe that the argument given for the guilt of Paloight in the matter of the death of a fellow student is convincing. Paloight is, in the opinion of this Council, if not guilty of murdering Elsen of Greenborough, at least guilty of leading him toward a path of darkness and necromancy that led to the cause of his death. In this way, Paloight is guilty either directly or indirectly of the death itself.

"To Paloight of Two-Hills the Council of the Hall can only reiterate that he should be glad that the will of the Council does not hold the true weight of law in this realm. For surely, if the Council's wisdom were allowed



to prevail as law as perhaps it should, Paloight's crimes against nature, wizardry, and the gods would be punished in a more severe manner than can be addressed to him under the current laws.

"As the matter stands, Paloight is to be punished to the extent to which the Council of the Hall is empowered. In this decision, the Council has considered not only the deeds and history of Paloight of Two-Hills, but also the likelihood that his continued presence at the Crystal Hall might cause further damage, and the damage his acts have done to the profession of wizardry as a whole.

"The judgment of the Council of the Hall is this. Paloight, former student of the Crystal Hall, shall be banished from the grounds, properties, and associations of the Crystal Hall. His awards and commendations shall be stricken, his properties and tools of wizardry shall be confiscated and he shall be set upon the sea to face his destiny and the will and anger of the gods alone. In this way shall he know the wrath of his brother-wizards for failing to maintain the standards which we, as a society, demand of our worthy members. Paloight shall be denied the protections and amiable relations of those who were his mentors, Masters, and friends.

"The Council prays that the gods find mercy, pity, and the power to change the heart of one whose soul is blackened by foul deeds. Failing this, we hope that Paloight of Two-Hills may find solace and peace in his death, whenever the gods should feel willing to grant it."

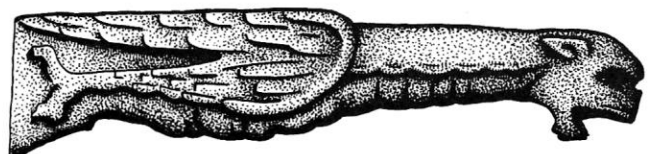
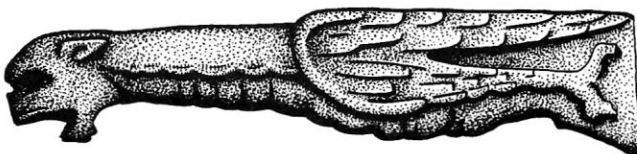
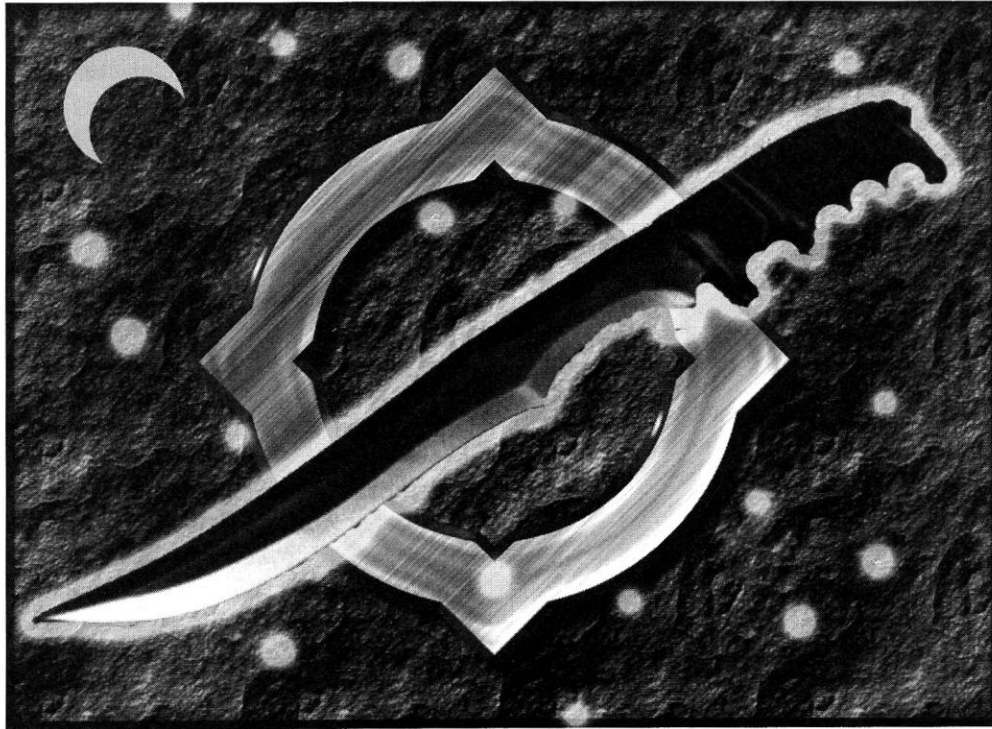
Judgment of the Council of the Crystal Hall against

Paloight of Two-Hills, former student and self-proclaimed Necromancer.

It is said that Paloight followed a dark path chosen for himself, and they are told that his path is one that inevitably leads to despair, destruction, and death. Rumors about Paloight persist among the apprentices and members of the Ninth Order of the Crystal Hall. Most of those who study in the Hall seem to believe the rumors more than the declarations and tales of the Masters of the Hall.

This is what the rumors say. Paloight was innocent of the murder. The other apprentice-wizard followed his own path of his own choosing, and the Masters feared the knowledge of necromancy. A murderer still lurks at the Hall, and this murderer may be among the Masters. Whether Paloight murdered Elsen or not, he was definitely a necromancer. The Masters and the Council saw him banished from the Hall in the hopes he would die, taking his secrets and darkness with him.

But Paloight did not die. He may have already conquered death, for he was always a brilliant if morbid apprentice. Instead he found the darkness that the other wizards feared and he became the murderer they named him. Paloight hunts those magics that will assist him in gaining power and exacting revenge, and he uses his powers to hunt the Masters who shunned, feared, persecuted, and framed him. Some say he hunts everyone at the Hall, that he looks only for a weakness to select his next victim.



Caislean

There is a certain agelessness in the life I've lead so far. I was forged in the infernos of Mount Pelinastrius more than two thousand years ago; since that time, I've had more owners than I can be reasonably expected to remember. Seventy-eight? Seventy-nine? Something well short of 100 and you'd be close, I suppose. I've traveled the Ten Thousand Lakes and both the Western and Eastern Oceans. With the exception of my three-hundred-year stay on the bottom of Lake Nadur (owner 16 was not a strong swimmer, and when our ship was sunk, he stayed sunk—along with me), I've been able to travel the world, always finding new owner's to dominate.

In answer to the question, 'What about your first owner and forger?' I answer, 'Never trust a man to do an elf's job.' You see, long ago there were two kings, one an elf and one a human. These kings did not like one another; in fact, they hated each other (and as an aside—anyone who tells you that elves are beyond hate, ignore them). As humans usually are, King Eldin was driven by greed and envy of what the elves could make and do. The elves, on the other hand, had wearied of human interference in their business and were horrified by human's treatment of the land. Not a good position for either nation. When King Eldin attacked the elven forests, he was repelled with ease. The king then nearly drove his court astrologer mad with endless, probing questions about the elves. And what it boiled down to was this—elven crafting was far the superior of human, and until the king had a sword of similar power to the Elf King, he was always going to be the receiver of pain, and never its dealer.

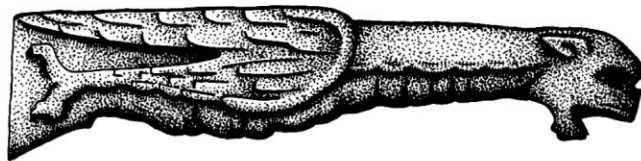
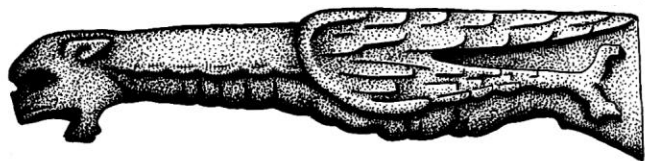
So despite the fact that Eldin was something of a dullard (arguably the most intellectually feeble of all of my owners, with the possible exception of Weyvin Adzi [owner 28], who kept me so close at his side that his drool frequently dulled my shine), he set himself up with a forge, a coterie of wizards, and a plan—to fashion a sword of power to compete with the elves.

To everyone's surprise, it seemed to work! After nearly a decade of slow, precise, and careful work, all overseen by the king, the wizards announced that they were ready to begin the work—and that they would start at the day's break. In his private chambers, jealous need for the sword overwhelmed the king and he rushed to the fires himself. Using the specially prepared metals and reading from scrolls in languages he had little more than passing knowledge of, he set to work. By sunrise, he had finished. I was made. He named me Caislean ('sunrise' in the now defunct Kasdani tongue of my forger). My oldest memory is being held in his hand as it shook with joy. I likewise recall the certain contempt I felt for him, Eldin my owner.

He was nothing compared to me. I was a great sword of power; he was a human and nothing more. Still, there was no getting myself around without him, so I surrendered to his control for the first 10 years of my existence. I knew little else to do (though I would quickly learn), but I didn't share his abiding hatred of the elves, so whenever he tried to use me against an elven foe, I didn't work as well, or at all.

It was in my tenth year that the crisis came. The elves had had a change in their king, the previous having fallen ill suddenly and died (quite uncommon for elves), and a change in policy. Whereas before they had been merely protective of their forests, the belief that King Eldin's people had poisoned their king was strong in their society. Now they wanted vengeance. So the new Elf King led a mighty host out of the forests to bring mayhem and destruction to the great plains. Despite the numerous emissaries sent by Eldin to the dwarves, there was to be no help from them; and no quarter was being given by the elves. Their death dealing was impressive. I could feel it from a considerable distance. Each time a human soul was snuffed out, I could sense its leaving. This was a new and interesting power, I thought. What might it mean in the future?

In the final contest, I found myself powerless from desire to be owned by the elven king. What would it feel like to be commanded by one of such obvious virtue, power, and authority? It turns out that it felt much like being owned by King Eldin. Mortal creatures have such base motivations, I have found. How can their futures be compared to mine? Even the Elf King, owner two, who never once used me, lost me to the bony-fingered grip of death. I was eventually stolen from my second owner's ancestral home by an extremely crafty little thief (I'm not sure quite what he was—gnome? Halfling?), who, always wearing gloves, never touched me with his flesh, so I was never able to impress myself on him—his mind was his own. He sold me to owner four, and things went downhill quickly from there. The next fifteen owners passed quite quickly—it seems that there was a brisk business in stolen elf swords (by this time, despite the fact that my manufacture was not of the highest order, I was thought of as an elf sword. If I had been, I wouldn't be having these issues with owners, I can tell you this!), and I was in hot demand. The nice thing about being desired by owners ill equipped to use me is that it gave me the chance to develop and test my powers. I totally dominated owner twelve, for instance, from the moment he set his hand on my hilt. He wasn't stupid—I'll give him that—but he was weak of spirit, giving himself over to his addictions and desires rather than fighting them. This helped me a great deal. By owner twenty, I was well on my way to being able to take something from each of my owners, develop-

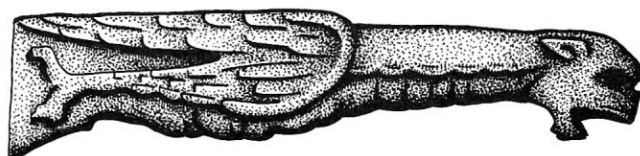
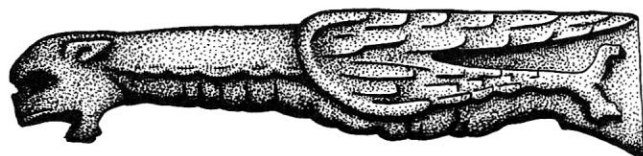
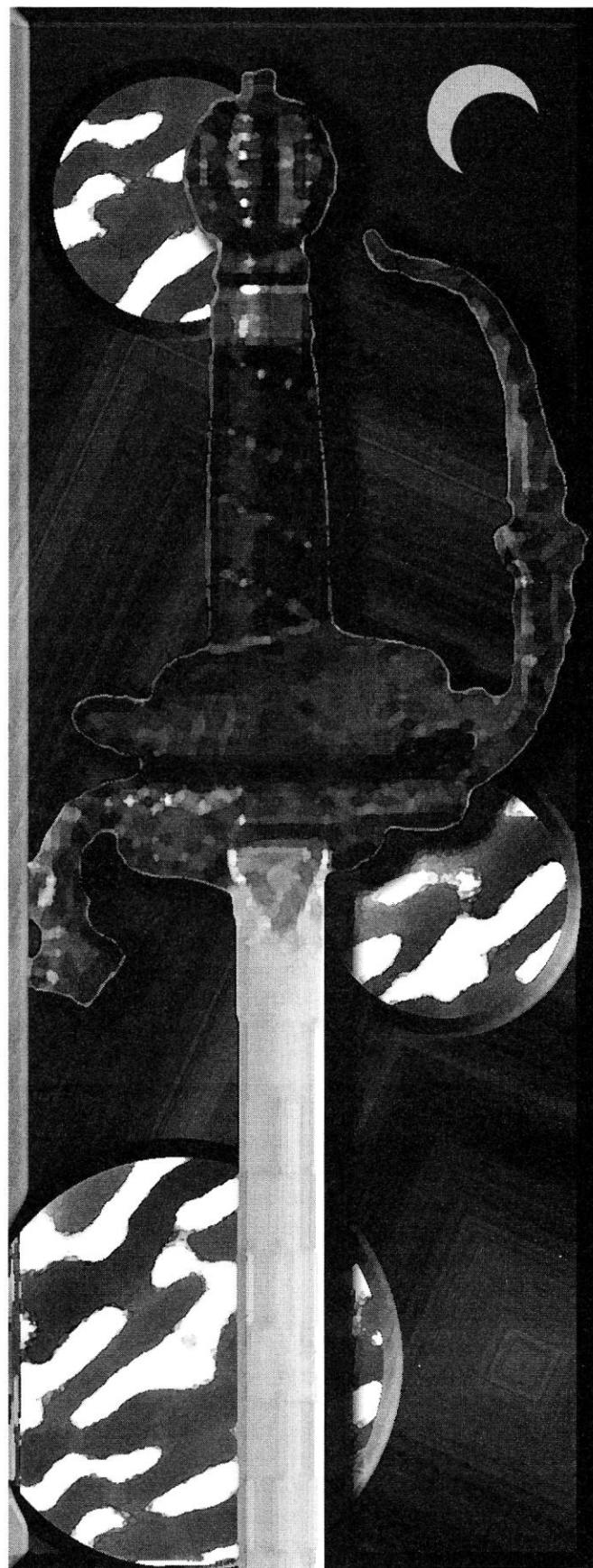


ing my own strength, and strength of purpose.

Now, owner forty-four, he was a winner. A barbarian from the distant north country, where it was always dreadfully cold so my hilt nearly cracked! But his lout was a fascinating warrior. All his moves were home grown, nothing from a fancy fencing school. That's what made him great in the southern nations, the fact that no one else could predict his style of fighting, always to their peril. He really didn't need my magic, and didn't even realize I was magical until a wizard he had angered let the fact slip in a lengthy tirade. For all those years I helped the barbarian slay hundreds of enemies, and he never once had given me any credit, but I really didn't mind. Just being in the hands of a winner for a change made me quite happy. Oh, don't get me started about all the pathetic losers between owners twenty and forty. Bunglers, all of them! But, once the barbarian found out I was magic he feared me. Barbarians can be such children! I tried to impress upon him that, together, we could rule over many nations, but he tossed me in a tar pit. Just like that. So long! Never trust a barbarian.

And while we're on the subject, let's get some things straight. There are a lot of misconceptions out there about magical swords and they cause us a lot of trouble. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and boy do most mortals have just a little knowledge! For one thing, we don't all glow. It just doesn't happen. That's a special feature, but because a couple of magical swords famed in song and story glowed now everyone thinks we all glow. So, if we don't, we're not broken or defective or evil. Second, we do rust, well most of us do, anyway. Leave us out in the rain and we corrode just like any other metal. Sure, there are some that don't, but they're the exception, not the rule. When they dragged me up from the bottom of the lake, for instance, they nearly threw me back! Who wants to clean up a rusty old sword, I ask you? And this last one's important: don't expect dramatic music to play every time you draw us out or start fighting with us. This is reality, not a fairy tale!

Which brings me to the present. Seventy-nine: Young, frighteningly strong (I think he has some orc blood in him), handsome, violent, difficult to control. I think we are on our way to the Caves of Origona, wherein resides the copper dragon Daranda, in whose presence I lost owner forty-seven. Seventy-nine doesn't hear what I'm telling him. Daranda embarrasses everyone! It's what copper dragons do. Just ignore it. I do! But I argue to no avail. We're less than two days from Origona, I think. My only hope is that seventy-seven and seventy-eight will hear my call and stop this lunatic from achieving his goal. I have no intention of becoming part of a dragon's horde, or, perish the thought, being consumed in the dragon's fire.



Rayna's Heart

It is told in the lengthy histories of the Dulama clans that there once was a time in the memory of the Thirty Clans when women did not rule. Indeed, stories tell of a time when all womenfolk were enslaved, mere pawns of more powerful men. While intriguing that none of the other twenty-nine clans tell of these times, it is generally acknowledged that the Dulama's Past Speakers have retained the wisdom of the ancient days and taught the Speakers of the other twenty-nine. They can be trusted.

There was once a great city near the River Hawlin, their story begins, ruled over by a mighty family whose rulers, the Al-Kanns, had built a great palace. The Nine Hundred it was called in polite company, because that is the number of its rooms. It was also called the Odalion, though this only by the Al-Kanns' enemies (who were numerous) and those few whose sense of justice was well honed. In The Nine Hundred were the Nine Thousand, the bound concubines of the Great Kann and his numerous sons. The Great Kann and his sons never married, according to their traditions, but instead had their chosen concubine brought to them, sometimes as many as 10 different ones per day. Any true-born son of a Great Kann joined his father in the Nine Hundred. Daughters and their mothers were given to the Eagles, as was the custom of the Al-Kanns.

There came a time when twins, one boy and one girl, were born to an Al-Kann—Lanan the Proud. Marillion was the name of the concubine mother of these twins, and she was not like the other concubines. She had been taken as a slave prize during a campaign against the Shekeri by Lanan the Proud. It is said that he loved Marillion more than anything else in his life, and he could not bring himself to give the mother and her daughter away, so he made an exception. They could live—though the daughter would be given away and sent to live in the country; Marillion would stay in the Nine Hundred and serve the Al-Kann. Lanan's advisors, in particular his Seer, warned against this plan, but nothing could sway him from his decision, not even the Seer's prediction that his young daughter would unmake his city, his family and his life.

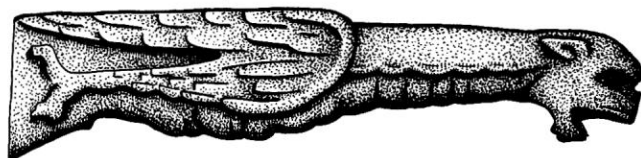
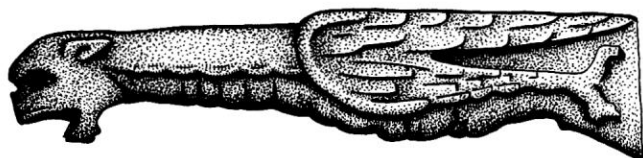
So under orders from the Al-Kann, the Seer brought the girl to a family far from the great city, near the Mountains of Sorrow that bordered the ancestral lands of Marillion's people and the lands of the Al-Kanns. The childless couple who took the girl in named her Rayna and treated her like a queen. From her mother, she learned women's skills and trades and developed her prodigious powers of intuition. It was often said of her that she knew where she needed to be before there was need. In contravention of

tradition, her adoptive father trained her in the arts of war. She was natively skilled in all manner of hand-to-hand combat and was extraordinarily lithe and flexible, with excellent jumping and maneuvering skills. Her strength, though never out of the ordinary, was more than complimented by a fine dexterity. There was one occasion, in her fourteenth year, when both her intuition and her flexibility came to bear. She had been at the market buying vegetables (her mother having long since trusted her to get the job done right) when she is said to have experienced a vision of her father, dead. Though she never spoke of this, she fled the market and rushed home. Because of this, she was able to save her father from the charge of a wild bull by distracting it from its charge, then leaping over the bull the moment before it ran her over, by gripping firm on its horns and propelling herself into the air. It is said that our tumbling sports, all of which involve animals in some way, come from Rayna.

Her sixteenth birthday was to coincide with a major festival—the Al-Kann was coming to town! After more than a decade of peace, the Shekeri had been coming over the mountains more and more, bringing havoc with them, and the Al-Kann who had beaten them once was to go over the mountains once more and finish them for good. Rayna, always an excellent judge of mood, did not fail to notice the apprehension that seemed to capture her mother's face and grip it in unease. The Al-Kann's retinue was well over two leagues in length—astounding! The girl stood on the parade route, but called no attention to herself—except perhaps in her facial expression. She thought she understood the world—this parade challenged all of this. Why, she wondered, were all of these women dressed so inappropriately for the cold mountain weather? Who were all of these young men, with not an ounce of the warrior's spirit to share amongst them? Where were the sturdy mules to carry the entourage and its equipment over the mountains? Had the Al-Kann not listened to the reports that the Shekeri had new, terrible weapons?

Lastly, she couldn't take the Al-Kann himself seriously. He was so long gone to wine and rich foods, she thought it a wonder that he could stand. In her mind, she conjured the sight of him swinging a sword, and she let loose a hearty laugh as the Al-Kann's carriage passed her. This attracted the attention of the still radiant, but certainly older woman in the carriage—Marillion. Mother and daughter locked eyes, and it was as if sixteen years had been erased. But before the two could speak, the Al-Kann's carriage had passed by.

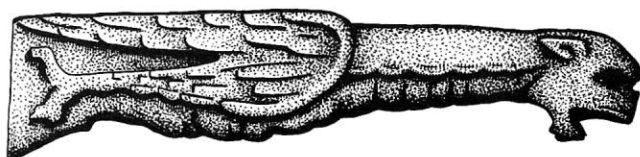
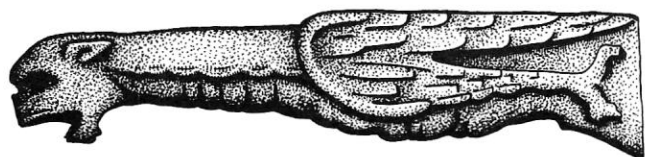
As the Al-Kann's men made their camp on the outskirts of Rayna's hometown, the young woman conjured up a plan. She would need first, however, to speak with her parents. The conversation was surprisingly candid. Her



adopted parents told her the whole story — leaving no details to the imagination. As they suspected, their daughter's sense of purpose was altered that day — where there had once been simple iron, cold reality had now forged a pure steel. She would not rest until her mother had been freed and the Nine Hundred had been dismantled.

As these stories usually turn out, there was both a hero (or in this case a heroine) and a villain — and the story turned out as it is expected to, with just one exception. Certainly Rayna freed her mother from the bonds of slavery, and did the same with the other Nine Thousand. But after her victories, despite many suitors, she remained pure and chaste until her dying day. Those who sought her hand were met with the steel she carried in hand in place of the wedding band that was never to grace those fingers — the glimmering steel of the sword that would become known as Rayna's Heart.

It is a great shame to the Dulama that the sword of their greatest savior has long been lost. It was last thought to be in the Clanlands, but whether it is possessed by someone or not, or merely lost, is beyond the Past Speakers' ken.



Lear, the Serpent of Caledonia

From chapter 7 of *A Short History of the Serpent of Caledonia*, by Mr. Anton Feswick, D.S.Let., Collegium Caledoniensis

Small and unimpressive from a distance, the Serpent of Caledonia achieves its greatest charm and radiance only up close, when one can easily discern its true glory. Brilliantly inlaid with gold and encrusted with jewels, it is notable above all for the serpent at its hilt, from which it derives its name. It is often said that snakes are wicked creatures, but in Caledonia, nothing could be further from the truth. The great serpents of that land, which is renowned for three things—its glorious mountains, its surprisingly excellent wine and its sturdy women—are considered blessed by all, including the priests and priestesses of Lear, the principle god of this region. The Lear cult, which gained prominence in Caledonia only about five hundred years ago, teaches that the numerous snakes which lived in Caledonia (nearly a hundred different types have been identified) are all manifestations of the divine spirit. In fact, Lear is at times depicted as having either a serpent's body, its head, or its forked tongue. Learists also believe that all creatures that walk on two or four legs are in some way less pure than snakes are. This has resulted in a set of beliefs that boggles the minds of outsiders. Snakes are given free rein in Caledonian cities—they come and go as they will. They are honored guests in homes throughout the land. The queen of Caledonia (for in that land all properties and holdings, including the monarchy, descend through the female line), has been the holder of the Serpent since before the coming of the Learists, suggesting a connection between their rise and the rise of the monarchy.

It is impossible to assign a date of manufacture to the Serpent; like many artifacts from the before-times, it is thought to have arrived in the mountainous East, before Caledonia was even an assortment of tribes who lived in the mountains to escape the predations of the Empire of Dalnac, whose armored legions controlled land from the Hanis to the Cald Mountains. In examining the Dalnacish records from the period in question, it seems likely that the Serpent actually originated in a now extinct dwarven kingdom known as Agilaz-azer. This might help explain the relatively small size of the sword for a human user. The Dalnac Empire had the most sophisticated trading network in human history, and they used it to bring exotics into their cities for nearly a millennium. Fine manufactures from the dwarves, unusual animals from the far northerly Hodispan peoples, delicate textiles from the elves, and wine from the Caldan, who would become the

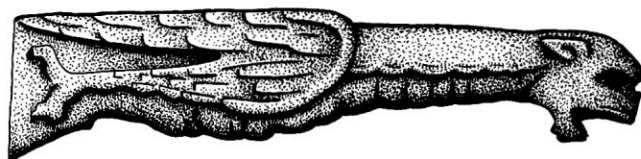
Caledonians.

What we do know of the weapon's origins is that the sword was captured in battle against the Dalnac by one of the descendants of the first Caledonian queen, Nananda the Clever. At the height of Dalnac power, their sorcerers believed that an attack on the Caldan would ensure the future of the Empire—they rightly believed that leaving the Caldan alone would compromise Imperial security. What they could not predict was that attacking the Caldan when they chose would be even more disastrous.

There is a great mosaic in the now ruined Stelin Palace in the ancient Dalnac capital that depicts the outcome of the Caldan campaigns. One can still see, if the light is right and one peers closely, a depiction of the assembled legions of the Empire parted. The Chariot of the Emperor, exposed to attack, turning to flee from the barbarian warrior princess of the Caldan, who, driving through the legions, cuts the hand of the Emperor from his body and steals his sword. We know what happens, but the artist doesn't show us—merely locates the conflict in a kind of eternal time and invites us to contemplate its meaning. The loss of the Serpent was to mean the rollback of the Dalnac enterprise. The successors to that throne adopted a profound conservatism in office, and when the empire was finally torn apart by internal forces and relentless pressure on its frontiers by "barbarians," chief amongst them the Caledonians, within two generations all except the people at the ancient core of the empire had long forgotten the blade, like a distant memory.

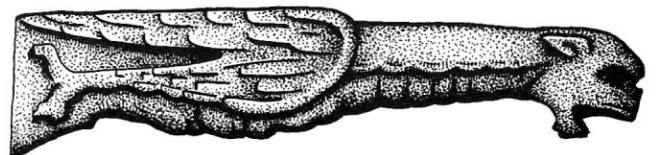
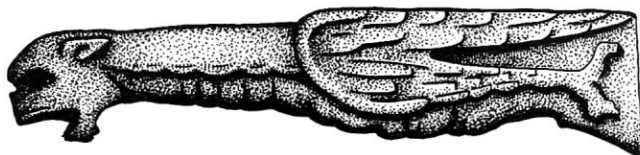
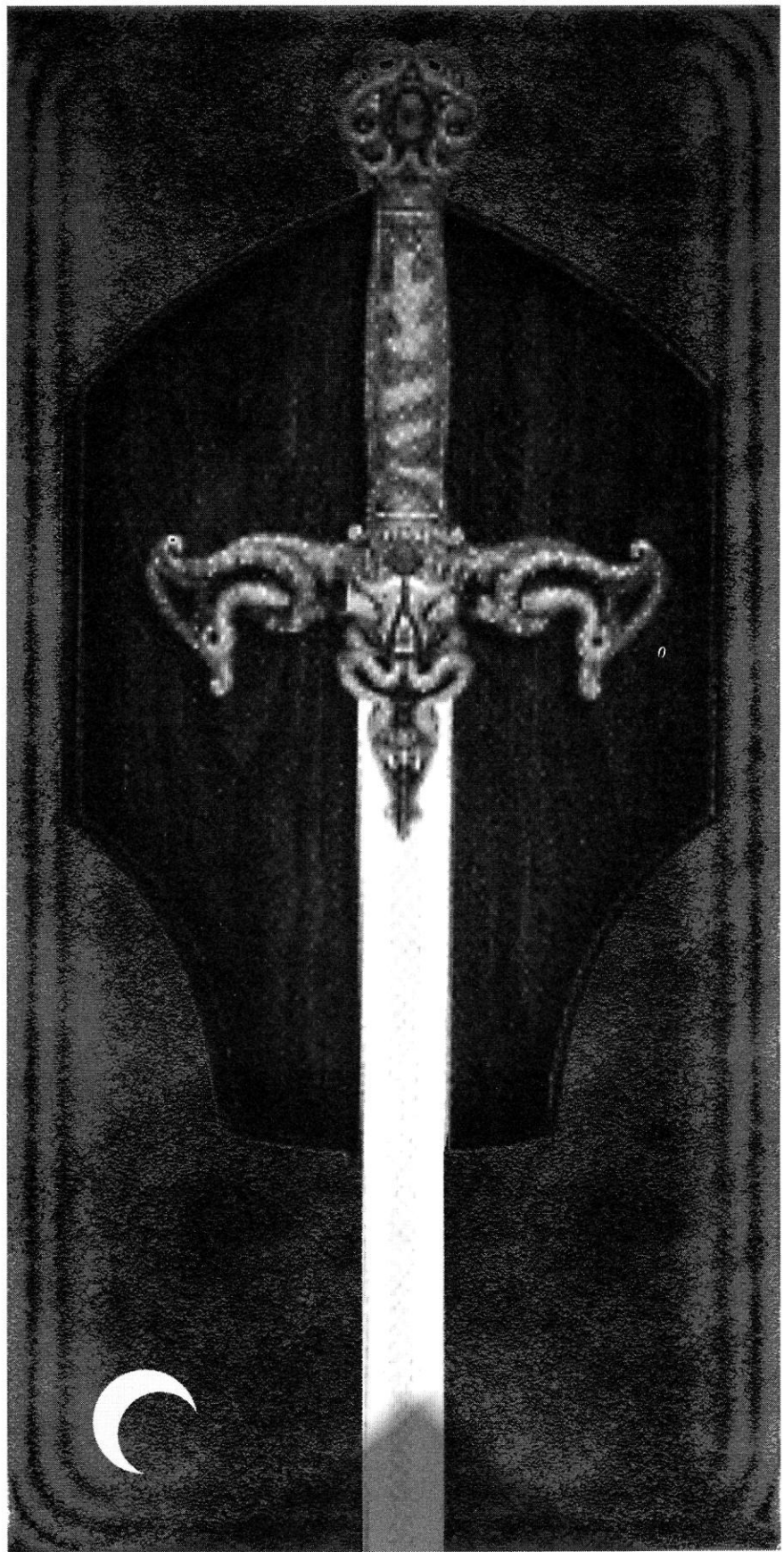
It was said in Dalno Dalnaticus' seminal "Historia Caledoniae" that the Serpent quickly integrated itself into the upper class life of the Caledonian people. It was owned by a succession of rich and powerful women; sometimes it passed from mother to daughter, but on at least two occasions, it was owned by men. After the fall of the Dalnac Empire, there was little external threat to the Caldan people, and an age of great cultural advancement ensued. It ended, according to the historians, with the founding of the monarchy. The Serpent was instrumental in ensuring that Nananda would come to the Granite Throne. Within the year, the Learists had appeared in a half-dozen Caledonian cities, preaching their strange religion. This historian would add an additional aspect to this indisputable fact. I argue that the Serpent is responsible for bringing the Lear cult to Caledonia. Though this might seem obvious to the untutored observer, it is significant to note that the Learists reject any association of this kind. The royal family and the priests have for more than two centuries denied any joint relationships between themselves, but the evidence suggests differently.

It seems evident that the use of the Serpent, at least to its fullest potential, is in some way dependent on the good graces of the Temple of Lear. Whether this was



always so or has become so as a result of the intrusion of the cult is unclear, but it is as though they have taken possession of this great tool. Perhaps the Learists come from the nation where the Serpent was made (if it wasn't made by the dwarfs). Perhaps they followed it here because they worship it. Whichever the reason, there is little doubt that the queen and her family have either been delivered, or have delivered themselves, into the hands of the cult. Still, this historian would need to see better evidence than is on offer that the queen has willingly embraced the Learists.

The Lear schools and temples are now in every village and city in the nation. Caledonia has rejected all of its gods, except Lear. This is bad for our society, as is keeping the Serpent so close to our nation's heart. I have been forced to accept the notion that the Serpent which so nurtured our nation in its past is now a great menace to us and must be gotten rid of. How we will do this is beyond my powers as a historian to contemplate. I know only this: Until we reject Lear and get rid of the Serpent, we will never be truly free.



Nathlaqua, the Serpent of the Underlands

Once upon a time, there were two serpents, Lear and Nathlaqua. When the world was young, they lived in an enormous garden, its trees, ferns and rocky protuberances sufficient to entertain even the most jaded snake for two lifetimes. They were, like their kind would become, prone to mischief and subterfuge, and they played complex games with one another that primarily involved hiding and seeking. They had no notions of a great creator of all things—or of any creatures other than themselves; they knew only the joy of one another's company. And so they lived, though not happily ever after.

One particularly clear night, when the air was preternaturally clean and crisp—though not unpleasantly cold—the two serpents were slithering near their favorite lake when they saw something in the sky they didn't quite like. There appeared to be another star up there, a star that was moving quite quickly—too quickly, and growing larger. Within a minute's time, they could hear the star—it was hissing, they thought, or perhaps humming. It was a sound dissimilar to their own fine hiss, but enough like it to warrant concern. Was this one of their parents? They had never given consideration to parents before. They seemed to exist in a timeless place, one with the other. It could not be their parents.

As they watched this star take a new form, they saw something that they could not name—what was it, they asked each other. They took flight, hiding themselves in the nooks of a recently dead, giant oak which had tumbled over during a lightning storm some months ago. As they watched, they saw an immense silvery vessel appear in the sky. To them, it most resembled a palm or fern frond in shape, but it was substantially larger than anything they'd ever seen. It seemed to be flying, or to have the ability to hover. The concept of flying was not something Lear and Nathlaqua were familiar with. They just saw something in the air that should not have been there, that had never been there before.

Riding atop the silver sliver (the two serpents were quite intelligent—they had coined this term within moments of their sighting it) was a number of creatures. Lear and Nathlaqua watched with considerable interest as these creatures appeared to guide the sliver to the ground and step off of it. The idea of stepping was new to these serpents as well, as they did not have legs. They watched these people from a distance. Each was as tall as a five-year sapling, though more sturdy around. They had four appendages that were attached to a central trunk, which at its top had the creatures' head. When they

moved their mouths, sound came from them. This likewise surprised the two serpents, who spoke with each other through telepathy. They heard the following sequence of sounds, though they did not understand it.

"Are they here?"

"I'm certain of it, my lord."

"Why haven't they shown themselves? You said they were clever and curious!"

"They are the only direct product of the Shaping that remade the world, my lord! They are all that is left of the age of great magics!"

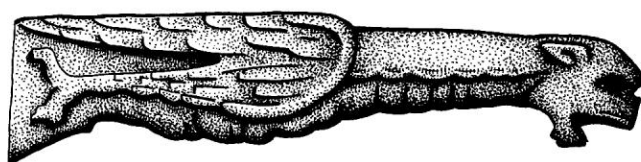
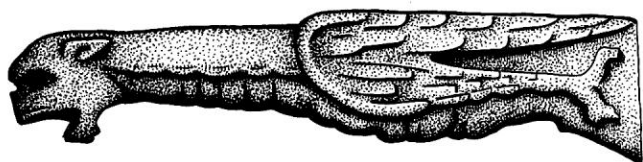
"Then find them, sorcerer, or you will suffer the fate of all dismal servants."

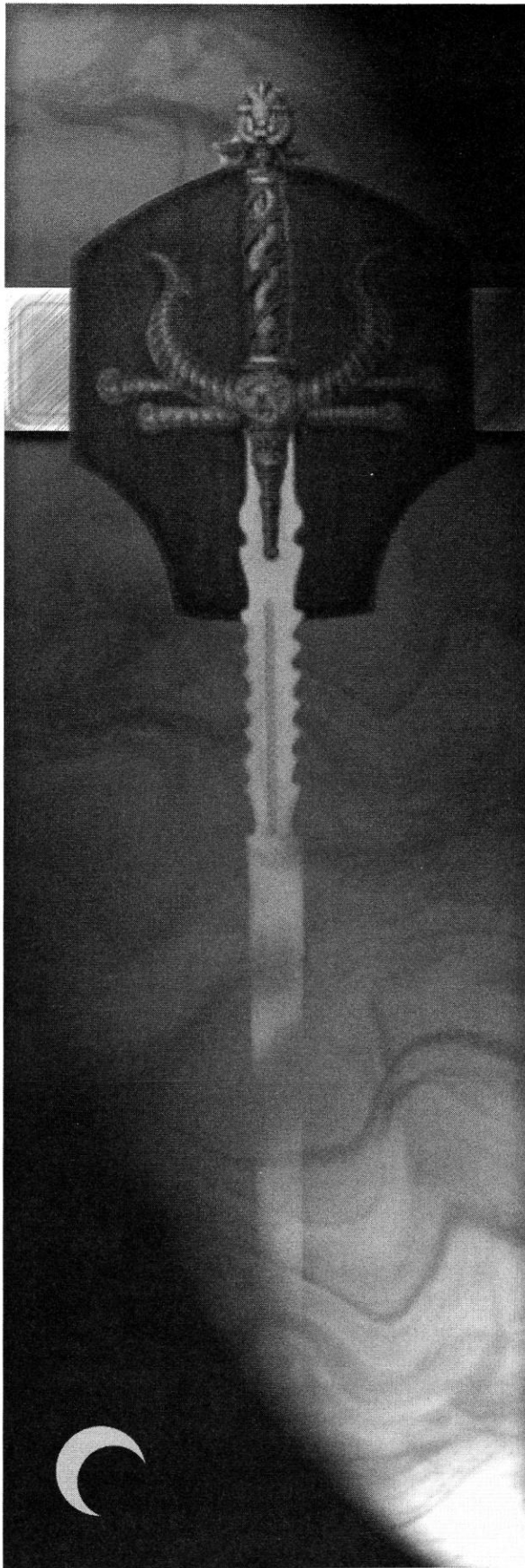
"And our society will be destroyed. I know, my lord."

The snakes watched as the creature who was wearing a cloth garment on top of his head closed his eyes. His whole body went tense, and he fell onto the ground, shaking and shouting. After about 20 seconds of this, he sat up and pointed right at them. In the next moment, the two serpents felt themselves being pulled from their hiding place in the tree by some kind of force which they had never before encountered. They were powerful, more powerful than they had ever realized, but they had never encountered any threat to their lives. They didn't know how to defend themselves. The powerful force pulled them from safety into the waiting arms of the sorcerer, who grabbed hold of them by their necks and placed them in two separate bags of holding. From that day, they never saw or heard one another again.

Lear was taken to the chambers of the Sorcerer Zelzah; the same wizard who had called the two serpents from their chambers. Zelzah conducted years upon years of experiments on Lear, attempting to find the answer to the question which had plagued him his entire wizarding life: How could ancient forces be extracted from modern sources? In essence, he'd gone around the question by finding an ancient force—the serpent Lear. Using the serpent's power without the serpent's permission, or just extracting it from him permanently seemed beyond the power of Zelzah. As it in fact was for nearly 50 years, all of which were spent by Lear in a small cage not much larger than the hiding hole from which he had been apprehended.

Without his companion Nathlaqua, Lear was angry, bitter, and powerless. He never stopped hoping that somehow Nathlaqua would find a way to locate him, but she never did. In the year of the Sorcerer Zelzah's death, Lear also met his. Zelzah had traveled far and wide, even spending some considerable amount of time in the Nine Hells, seeking the answers to the questions that vexed his life. When discovering them, he returned at once to his home—and extracted Lear's life force, killing the quasi-divine serpent instantly. This life force was placed in a

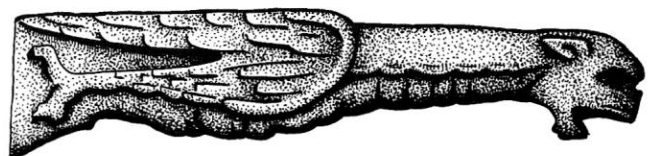
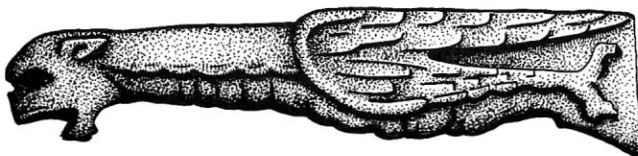




powerful sword that was used to plague the naga's, and eventually it alone was responsible for the diminished power of the Naga Empire.

Nathlaqua did not know any of this, however, and has still not discovered it. She would, at the most fractional core of her heart that still remembers her time in the garden, probably prefer Lear's fate to her own. She was captured for a single reason—to save the Dalnac Republic from utter annihilation at the hands of the Nagafist, a vast underground naga empire that coursed underneath the Dalnac Republic in 10,000 leagues of tunnels, caves, and chambers. The naga always paid very close attention to their drider compatriots (the drider state being in close contact with the Nagafist), and the driders had heard through their agents in the above that the war between the Nagafist and the humans was turning quite seriously against the topsiders. Within 18 months, the Fist might prevail. The humans had undertaken a search for any source of magic that might turn the tide. The driders said that the humans had located one, and incredibly, it was to be found in two snakes. This presented a serious problem for the naga: If the humans were able to turn back the forces of darkness, so they said, then what would the forces of darkness do but turn on themselves. This was not acceptable, so the naga queen devised a solution, and she sent one of her servants to Dalnac itself to consult with the Senate.

The solution was elegant and simple. When the humans found their magical snakes, they would give one to the naga, and the naga would end their war with the topsiders. The Dalnac were content to take the offer, not realizing that in so doing, they would make the naga insurmountably powerful and destroy the spirit of a creature who was, at heart, pure and good.



The Sword of Takal

Takal was a name both feared and loathed throughout the planes. A demon from the deepest pits of the abyss, Takal took joy in spreading pain, suffering and death throughout the worlds that he visited. He was evil and cruel, even to the point that other demons would distance themselves from him lest they be hunted by the powers that sought to end Takal's tyranny.

Takal jumped from plane to plane, dimension to dimension, epoch to epoch for what seemed millennia, leaving nothing but death and destruction in his wake. At first, the gods refused to interfere – it was not their place, but soon even the most aloof of them couldn't help but take action.

At first the gods of good instructed their mortal followers to hunt down and destroy Takal. The demon could not be taken down so easily, however. No matter what he faced, the demon survived to spread his own brand of chaos. The more that the gods threw at him, the more allies Takal would summon to his aid.

The gods soon came to realize that they could not continue to send their mortal legions after Takal – thousands had already died for naught. Yet if they appeared to directly fight the demon, he would just retreat to his own plane, a place that would be dangerous to even them. If they were to destroy him, they would have to trick him into appearing on the mortal plane and then overwhelm him before he could call for help or escape. Moreover, they would have to have some way of destroying him once he was trapped.

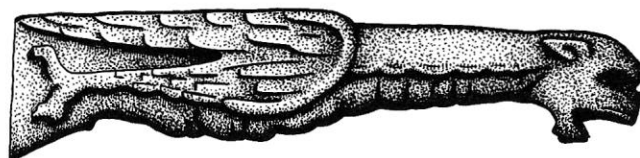
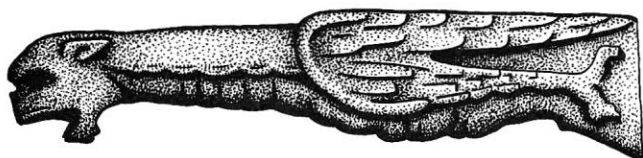
In all his travels, Takal never appeared on a regular schedule or for particular reasons. He truly was chaos embodied, but after they studied him, the gods soon came to realize that Takal had a weakness. He cared about nothing but spreading chaos, but he always seemed to take pleasure in hunting down and destroying the followers of Obad-Hai. While Takal hated good, he could not abide any who refused to make a moral or ethical choice. Chaos needed order, for without the other each would be meaningless, would be neutral. So the gods opposing Takal chose to lure him to the mortal plane using the followers of Odad-Hai as bait.

They knew, however, that Obad-Hai would not help them. The gods would have to make a tempting enough target for Takal without the neutral god's assistance or even knowledge. So they surreptitiously blessed Obad-Hai's followers on the continent of Fleurr. They granted fair weather, protection from enemies and even the favor of some of their most powerful faithful. More than that, they encouraged some of their best warriors and magic users to join the ranks of Obad-Hai's followers. Within



short order, Obad-Hai's ranks had swollen to immense numbers. But that was only the simplest part of their elaborate plan.

The gods aligned against Takal had to prepare their own clerics and wizards for the battle to come. These spellcasters would be the most important part of the trap for without them Takal would easily escape. They would have to enchant the entire battlefield to prevent any portals or teleportation from happening. Of course, their spells would also prevent them from calling for any assis-



tance, but that was a risk that they had to take. This preparation took much time, if only because they had to gather enough spellcasters that they could trust with the secret of what they were planning on doing and then teach them the spells that they would use.

The final key to the defeat of Takal was the weapon that would deliver the fatal blow. The task of forging this weapon was given to the followers of Souren. Souren herself chose the bladesmith to create this incredible weapon, a devout worshipper named Gendran. Souren provided him all of the raw materials he would need to craft this weapon and he began the long work while she called her own wizards to cast the necessary enchantments. But those were not the only things needed to create this weapon.

If this blade were to kill Takal, it would have to be not only blessed by the gods, but some bit of his essence, or that of a more powerful demon lord, would have to be infused into it. No single soul, living or dead, had ever harmed Takal, however. So Souren dispatched her own faithful on a quest to recover the blood of a powerful demon lord. Thousands more died on this quest, one that took years, but eventually one lucky soul returned with the blood of Orcus. With that, Souren watched over the final creation of this special weapon. When it was completed, one by one the gods aligned against Takal took the sword in hand and blessed it.

Soon, they were ready. Though Takal had continued on his rampage across the planes in the meantime, bringing suffering and death to untold numbers, they reasoned among themselves that it was for the ultimate good. They would destroy this demon once and for all.

But Takal did not take their bait, at least at first. Instead of appearing himself, he sent his demon allies to torture the followers of Obad-Hai in the city of Tren-Til. As was typical, the truest followers of the nature god scattered to the four winds when faced with the evil of Takal's horde. But that left a significant number of warriors and spellcasters that the allied gods had infiltrated into Obad-Hai's numbers. Faced with a strong resistance, the demons called upon Takal to help them. He appeared personally, along with a legion of more demons, to find out what had changed.

Faced with two huge forces of demons, including the worst of them all, the army of the allied gods prayed for more assistance before they sprung the trap, but received none. The gods would not involve themselves because the same magics that would make Takal vulnerable would do the same to them. They watched as their army,

outnumbered and already weakened, fought against the demon hordes.

For their part, the spellcasters did their job well. They surrounded the entire battlefield with a magical barrier that would prevent anyone – mortal or demon – from leaving and rendered the magical protections of the demons nearly impotent. They then turned toward more offensive magics, cutting down wave after wave of evil minion.

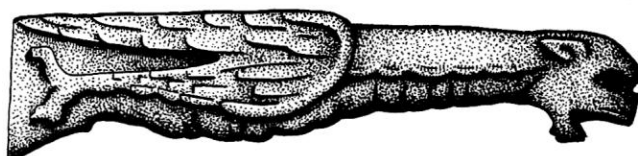
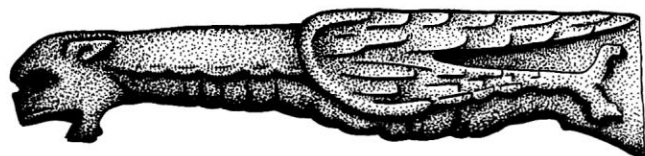
The battle waged for three days and nights. No living being ventured anywhere near the battlefield, lest they be drawn into that hell. Travelers a hundred leagues away could see the glow of the battle in the twilight sky and even feel the shaking of the ground. Countless beings died, but in the end Takal was wounded heinously.

When he saw that, Gendran rushed to the demon lord with the magical sword in his hand. Held nearly immobile by binding spells cast at him from all sides, Takal was as vulnerable as he would ever be. Gendran struck at the demon's chest, piercing his heart. In a flash, the demon's life force exploded out, knocking all to the ground and sundering the magical barrier. Mortally wounded by Takal's final attack, Gendran made one final act – he pulled the sword from the demon's body and cut his head off. With that, Gendran died.

The battle continued for a few hours longer as the surviving demons finished off the allied army. Here again the gods refused to intervene – they simply could not allow any of the spellcasters to survive with the knowledge of how to render a powerful super-dimensional creature – beings like themselves – impotent. In the end, no mortal survived the battle.

When it was over, the gods descended on the ruins of the Tren-Til battlefield. They cut down the few surviving demons and turned the corpses of all the battle's participants to stone. They pulverized Takal's remains, insuring he could never be raised. They erected a simple stone obelisk in the middle of the battlefield, inscribed with the tale of Takal and all of the names of those who sacrificed their lives to destroy him. With that, they left. Before she left, though, Souren picked up the sword Gendran had forged and embedded it in the obelisk, leaving it behind in preparation for the day another immortal being would need to be punished. After they left, the gods caused a thick forest to grow up around the ruined city, burying the battlefield.

It is said that the Sword of Takal can only be removed from the obelisk by a man of the purest motivations, and then only if he is on a quest to destroy an immortal.



Black Soul's Revenge

Many swords have tales that are told of their creation or of the exploits of those who wielded them, but few are as varied as that of the blade known as Black Soul's Revenge. Every race that has encountered the weapon has a different name for it because every time it changes hands, it seemingly imbues a different personality upon its owner.

The sword's genesis is rather humble. Forged by a common blacksmith from everyday iron, the saber was one of a hundred displayed in the bazaars of Golen-Tur, a coastal city frequented by pirates and legitimate mariners alike. It was purchased by a young elf navigator serving on the sailing vessel Terbrek with the meager wages his captain paid him after his first voyage.

Young Trannen carried that saber with him for the next ten years. During that time he fought in and against too many boarding and raiding parties to even count. He was not a professional fighter, but he became quite proficient with his weapon. There was nothing special about it, but it held a special place in his heart – it was the first thing he had ever bought after his first voyage as navigator, after all.

But Trannen wasn't happy on the Terbrek. His first captain was hard, but at least he treated his men fairly. After that captain was killed on shore, however, a new captain came to fill his shoes, one that only cared about himself. During the course of the next voyage, Trannen, as well as most of the crew, came to hate their new captain. But the captain was protected by two men he had brought along, powerful men who made sure his will was carried out with an iron fist. Those who mutinied against the captain quickly found themselves dead.

The crew knew they had to do something, but most, including Trannen, were too scared to directly move against the captain. Following a raid on a passing ship, however, Trannen found the answer to the crew's woes. The raid was hugely successful and netted a fortune in jewels and coins. The ship they raided was also carrying a number of ancient and nearly indistinguishable statues and idols. The captain had given each man on the successful raiding party the choice of one item that they could keep for themselves, but when Trannen chose a spectacular necklace full of gems, the captain took it away from him and claimed it for himself.

Angered, Trannen searched the booty for something that his vindictive captain wouldn't steal from him. Then a statue caught his eye. It was ancient. But it wasn't beautiful or encrusted with treasures. It showed the bust of some humanoid and was apparently meant to sit on an altar. But it was so old and worn that Trannen couldn't

make out what the form was supposed to be. Yet words inscribed into the base of the statue were as sharp as the day they'd been etched.

The rest of the ship's officers laughed at Trannen when he took the statue, but the second he touched it, he knew that it belonged with him. He tried to decipher the script carved into the statue's base, but it was written in a language that no one on the ship had ever seen before, let alone knew.

Nevertheless, he stared at the statue for hours on end whenever he had the chance. That continued for a year, until one night he suddenly noticed the outline of a secret compartment on the base of the statue. It took him another two frustrating months before he could figure out how to open the thing, but when he finally did, his prayers were answered. Inside was a tome – the Book of R'yeltar.

Trannen studied it for weeks, enthralled by the tales of R'yeltar's followers. Moreover, it allowed him to translate the inscription on the base of the statue – a spell to summon R'yeltar himself. Trannen cast the spell that very night.

R'yeltar appeared not in a flash or in a vision from on high. Instead, an elf appeared before him, dressed not unlike any other sailor on the ship. Only in his hand he carried a deck of cards.

R'yeltar asked him, "What do you want, young Tannen?"

"I want to be delivered from this hell!" he responded.

"Then deliver you I shall." He held up the deck, fanning the cards in his hand. "Choose, young Tannen."

But Tannen looked confused. "I don't understand."

"Choose, and then you will. Deliverance can take on many forms. Chance will determine the form."

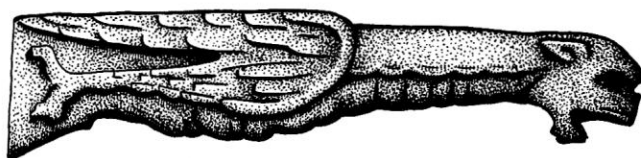
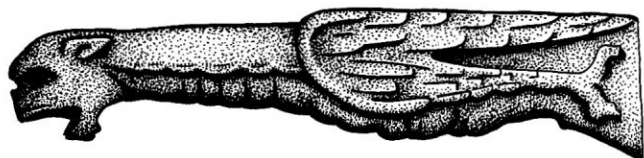
So Tannen picked a card from the hand, but when he held it up, it showed nothing but blackness. "Interesting," R'yeltar said. "This will be interesting indeed. Choose again."

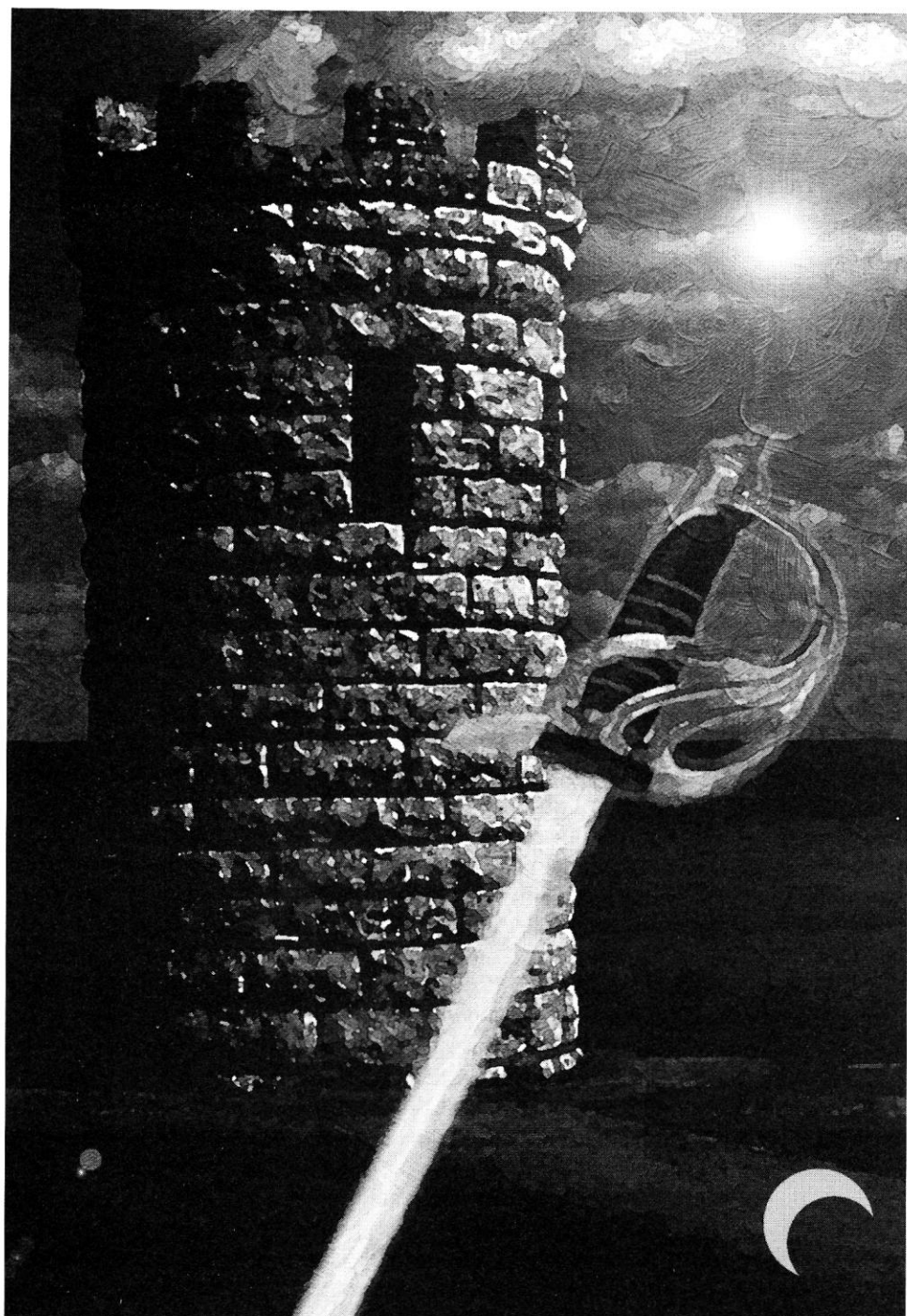
Tannen picked a second card, this one showing the image of a jester. "Ahh, even more interesting. You may pick a third."

A bloody sword adorned the card. "Very well, young Tannen, you are delivered. Congratulations on a game well played!"

Before the elf could even ask R'yeltar what he meant, he was gone, leaving behind only the cards. When Tannen looked back at the statue, he suddenly recognized the face as that of his visitor. But the entire conversation still did not make any sense to Tannen, at least until he looked to his sword. It caught his eye in a way it never had before. He grabbed it, took it from his scabbard, and went on deck.

Ten minutes later, the captain's two henchmen were dead and Tannen had the captain on the gang plank, the





crew rallied behind him in a makeshift court. When they passed sentence, Tannen decapitated his former captain, letting his corpse fall into the ocean. From that point on, a newly emboldened and energized Tannen was captain, a position he enjoyed for the next thirty years. During that time, he gave up outright piracy, instead concentrating on being a buccaneer, operating under letters of marque issued in Golen-Tur and other commerce centers. He and his crew enjoyed much success and became quite rich. In

all that time, he never gave up that sword he had bought so long ago, though he did eventually have the blade reseated in a new grip, highlighted with a golden handguard.

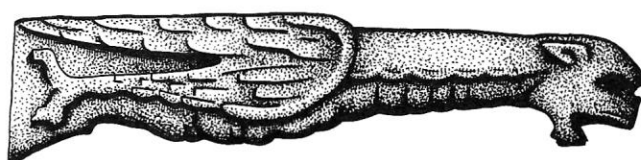
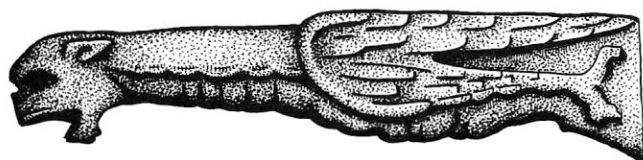
When Tannen died, he passed his sword on to his son, Jobrith, who captained the Terbrek's sister ship. Tannen's son was very much like his father, and the two had kept the seas safe for years, at least for those who paid them well enough. After his father's death, however, Jobrith turned into a hedonistic gambler and drunk. He never again looked at his ships, leaving them to operate on their own. He lived solely on their profits, but not for long. His father's sword did not protect him nearly as well as it had his father, and he died at the hands of a murderous thief.

The thief took his money and his sword, but before he could sell the sword, he experienced his own transformation. He turned his back on his evil ways and became a crusader of sorts, protecting travelers, vagrants and the innocent from predators like he once was.

Those are just a few of the stories in the long and occasionally sullied history of the sword that came to be known as Black Soul's Revenge. Each of the stories in this once-common sword's history tells of a person whose personality radically changed after coming into possession of it. Yet there is neither rhyme nor reason to the shifts that these people seem to experience. Likewise, in addition to the personality shift, each person who comes into contact with the sword alters

their station in life in some drastic way, as if the sword continues to "deliver" its owners from their lives, whether or not they want it.

Today, Black Soul's Revenge belongs to a warrior named Ragahar. Once, he was a mere shopkeeper, but when the sword's last owner dropped dead within his shop, he was "delivered" from his dreary existence. Now, he is the self-proclaimed lord high executioner of Arconan the Damned, dispensing the justice of that dark lord.



Sword of the Elf Lord

Elves are very magical creatures delighting in surrounding themselves with items of magic. When an elf lord reaches their hundredth year they are always gifted with some type of very special magical device. This device is meant to help them all the rest of their long lives. Generally, if the elf is the type who deals with lots of battles they are gifted with a highly magical sword. At the same time they are expected to go on their Journey of Elements. They travel about the land seeking something from earth, air, fire, and water. What they bring back to show their relatives is supposed to be a measure of their success for the rest of their lives. Royal elves who have made a true mark in the history of the elves have been known to bring back priceless rubies, magical artifacts of great power, and even creatures. Tragian's cousin, the know king of the elves in the Deep Woods brought back a subdued red dragon from his journey.

Tragian was the first and favorite cousin of the Elf King and he was gifted with a sword by the king. With a loud party and much fanfare Tragian was sent off on his journey. Like all elves his age he hoped for great adventure and a good story to tell when he got back. Without a real sense of where he should go he headed west. It was several days into the trip before the qualities of his sword manifested themselves. As Tragian walked on his Journey of Elements he was practicing with his new sword. He'd never held a weapon so fine in his life. He also wondered at the strange golden runes on the blade. Imaginary foes fell by the hundreds and this bush or that weed was sliced in two.

"I'm getting quite a bit of sap on my blade, you might consider cleaning me before I'm sheathed."

"You talk?"

"Tragian the Lout you will be called if you think the King of the Elves would present you with an ordinary magical sword. I do many things and if you please me I can tell you about them."

"Please you?"

"You seem to be having problems forming long sentences. Also, there is an unusually thick dwarf doing a very adequate job of hiding off the path to your right there."

A simple spell cast in that direction got an immediate reply from the hiding dwarf. As the plants in his area began to entangle him, his time of hiding was over. Tragian noticed with interest that even huge vines were broken as the dwarf pulled his way out of the underbrush. The entanglement magic didn't seem to have any effect on the dwarf. His muscles expanded with the effort of breaking free of the hundreds of plants reaching out for

his arms, chest, and legs. In the hundred years of his life, Tragian had never seen a creature strong enough to pull free of that spell, he was very impressed. The elf stood ready to defend himself on the forest path.

"Peace, peace elf, I would not fight with you." The dwarf was speaking in a very clear elf tongue. "My name is Mountainsplitter, I'm a prince and son of the King of the White Mountain. I'm on a journey of discovery that we dwarves need to take several times in our lives and I've gotten quite lost in these woods of yours. If you help me escape them, I will owe you a great favor. What say you elf?"

The dwarf was massively strong and broader across his shoulders than he was tall. There was a huge warhammer strapped to his back and he was in an unusually thick suit of armor. Tragian thought the dwarf would be a perfect earth element for his journey. Also the dwarves of the White Mountain were famous for their strength and deadly fighting skills. Tragian was smart enough to realize that he could learn a lot from this dwarf. It also occurred to him that it was very unusual that two members of different races would be on similar journeys when they met.

"Mountainsplitter, I'll help you leave these woods for awhile, if you will journey with me till the end of my trip. Then you must allow me to present you to my cousin the King of the Elves, at that time your favor to me will be over, agreed?"

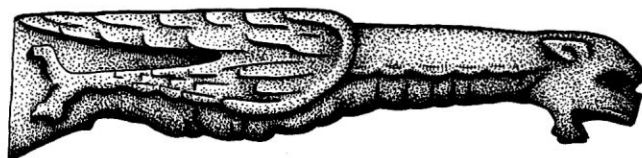
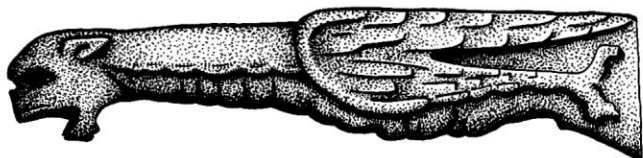
"Done!" The dwarf put out a hand that was larger than Tragian's head and they shook on the bargain. "I thought I was hiding pretty good back there. How did you spot me?"

"Oh I didn't my sword did. I've just learned it's a talking blade."

"I thought the weapon looked special. Those runes on the blade speak of intelligence and purpose. You will have your hands full with that weapon, pun intended." The dwarf's smile was as huge as his muscles.

For the next several weeks they walked out of the Deep Forest and into the grasslands of Ur. They became friends and Tragian started learning the dwarven tongue while Mountainsplitter learned more elvish. It was a plume of smoke in the distance that attracted their attention on the tenth morning of their travels together. Moving in that direction they discovered a very strange sight.

In the middle of a circular burned area was a gnome. The grass was head tall everywhere else. The circle of burnt grass was about fifty steps wide in all directions. The little creature was floating in the air about a foot off the ground. He appeared to be sitting on a cloud of smoke. The really strange thing about the gnome was that its body was burning brightly, but it didn't seem to be taking any harm from the flames. The pair could feel



great heat coming from the magical burning. Tragian who was very familiar with magical spells couldn't figure out how the gnome was doing it. As the two approached the gnome looked up at the pair and smiled.

"Tragian, Mountainsplitter, welcome to my circle. My name is SelsenSa and Tragian I'm your element of fire."

Tragian looked more closely at the gnome. He had no idea how a strange gnome could know about his elemental journey much less know what elements he needed. Tragian was intrigued at the thought of the gnome being a fire element. The creature certainly qualified as it burned brightly.

"Gnome, I know your kind."

Mountainsplitter spoke in the tongue of the gnomes. "Why are you floating there, burning?"

"I'm very glad to see you both as I wouldn't have been able to maintain this spell much longer." The gnome landed on its feet, the flames going out on its body and the heat vanishing with the spell. The small humanoid came over to the pair with a grin on its face. "You will want to ready your weapons. The 22 lions that have been kept away by my fire will be upon us in heartbeats."

"Lions?"

"Lions all around us!" The sword shouted its warning.

"Lions!" Mountainsplitter shouted as he grabbed his warhammer and waded into three of the advancing felines.

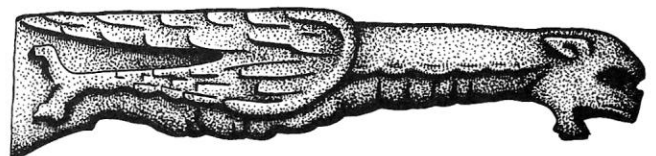
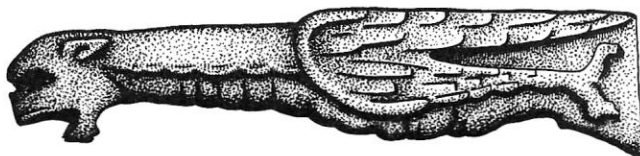
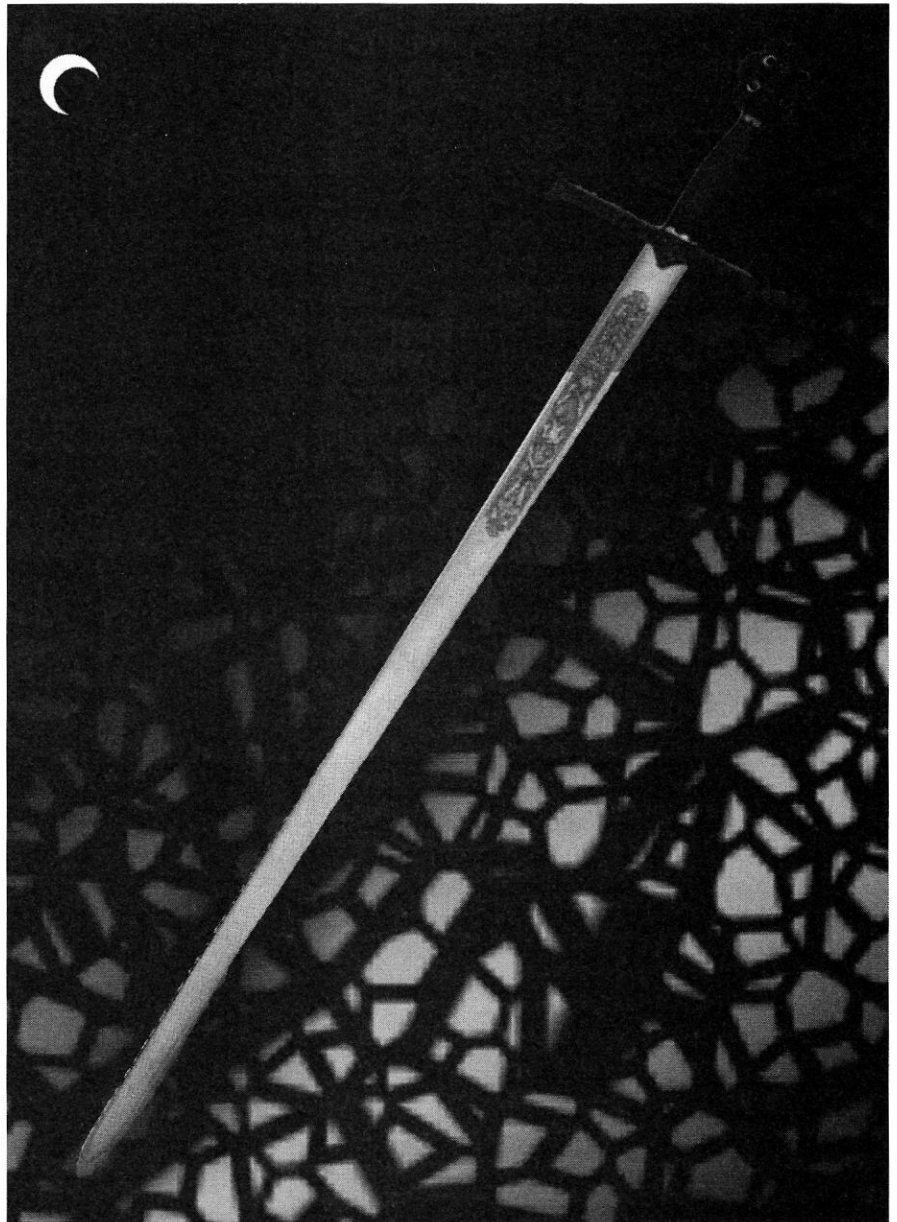
A pride of lions completely circled the three. The lions weren't intimidated at all by the strength of the dwarf, the animal speaking ability of the gnome, of the spells of the elf. The battle was brutal and the dwarf took much of the attention of the lions as they leapt, clawed, and bit at the three. When it was over there were ten dead lions at their feet and the rest of the creatures sped away wounded. During the battle Tragian learned his blade allowed him to teleport, as he was being attacked by three leaping lions and found himself on the other side of the clearing before they could strike.

"Well it looks like they are done with us. It also looks like we will be having lion for dinner." The dwarf looked his other two companions over for wounds and was pleased to find none.

"I've never eaten lion, but I'm more

than willing to start the cooking fire. I have some abilities at divination and knew you would be coming. I sensed the lions and thought of my little plan so that they wouldn't be attacking us all by surprise. Also, Tragian I just want you to know that I would be happy to travel with you until you are finished with your journey. I've always wanted to meet the king of the elves of the deep woods."

"Well that answers many questions good SelsenSa. I still want to know how you do that interesting body fire thing."

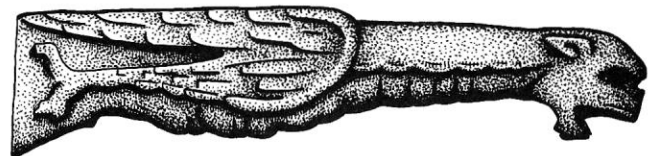
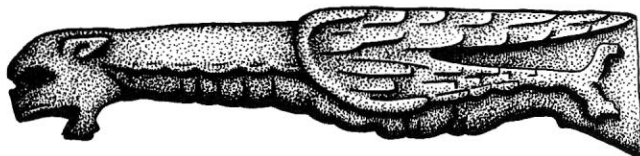
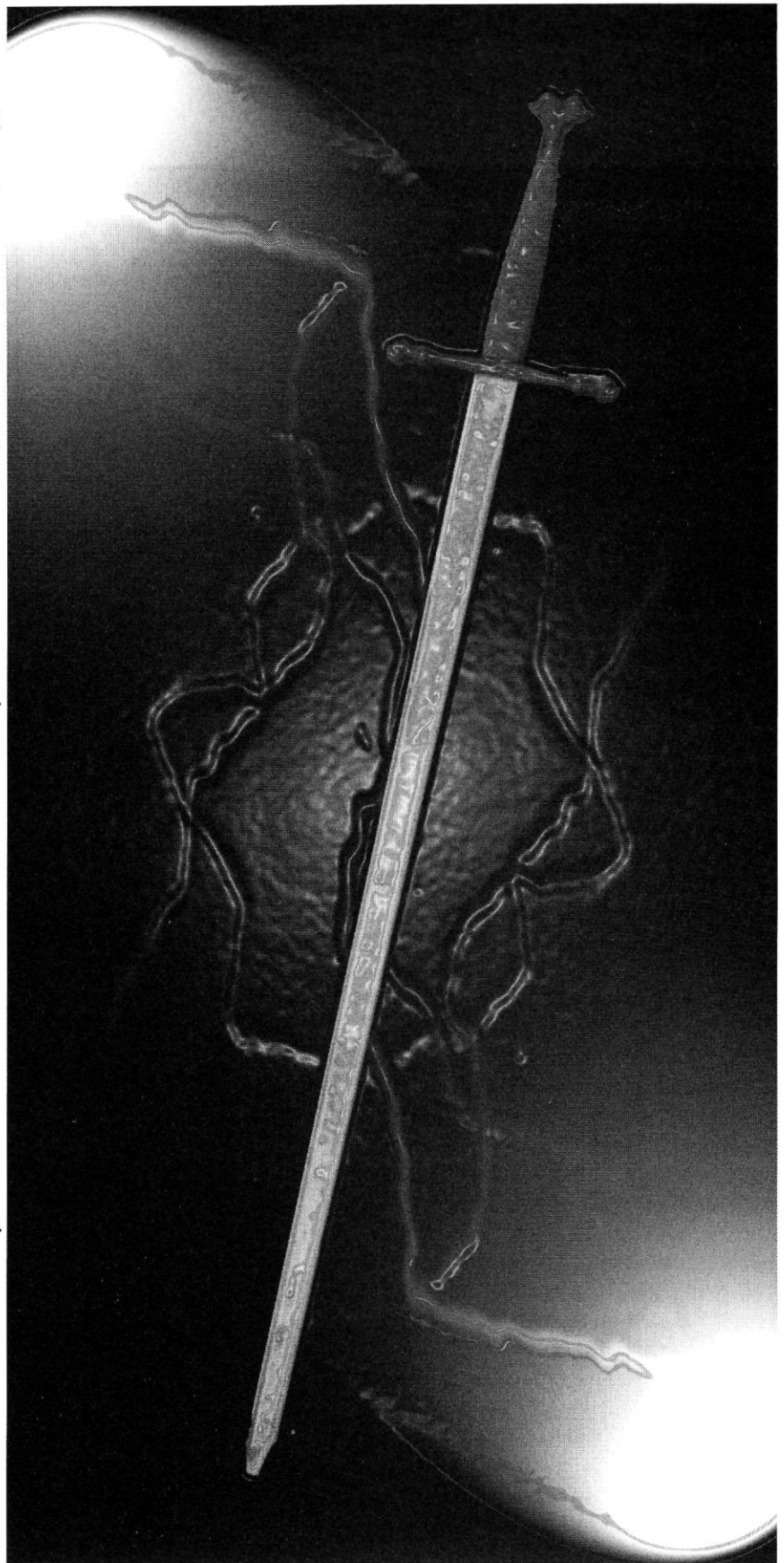


Human Ender

Troglodytes are not the brightest of humanoid creatures. They greatly enjoy making catacomb lairs hidden within miles of human settlements. Troglodytes have a taste for human flesh and the cattle humans like to raise. Troglodytes don't like getting raided and destroyed by the humans they are preying on. In the scheme of things they can't understand their bad luck when human armored fighters and clerics come bursting into their lairs and kill all the slow among them. These actions do, however, give all troglodytes a deep appreciation of steel of all types. They don't know how to maintain the steel and the wet of their caverns always turns weapons and armor into useless rust. Humans had invaded the troglodyte city four times in the past year. It had taken hundreds of troglodytes and a whole lot of stench to finally kill the groups. It was clear the city was no longer hidden from the minds of men. It was also clear that if the leader didn't think of something quick there wouldn't be a trog city next year. It's a little known fact that leaders of the troglodytes must always become clerics. These clerics are usually the strongest members of the race. Sometimes they are the most intelligent instead. When the leader is intelligent that always signals a wave of above ground invasions and an expansion of the lizards area of influence.

The gods of the troglodytes were clearly worried. There was only one large underground city and four small outposts left for the troglodytes on the entire prime material plane. If these locations were destroyed there would be no more worshipers for the foul deities. So they began sending dreams to the chieftain. He dreamed of using glowing green swords on humans and defeating them all over the surface. He dreamed of gaining those swords from dwarves in trade for the golden spheres the troglodytes made for toys from their young. Even with all these nightly dreams it took five weeks before the chieftain of the troglodytes could figure out exactly what to do. The gods vowed to blast the chieftain with lightning the very next time it came out from the caverns.

The troglodyte leader went down to the feeding pens and looked over the herd. It had the herders cull out all the dwarves from the mix of



humans, dwarves, elves, and gnomes. There were seven surly, naked dwarves standing in front of it when they were through. The leader had its troops cut the beards and hair from the dwarves. For an hour the chief watched them scream and struggle. It amused the chief greatly and when they were done the dwarves stood a little more humbly before the troglodyte leader. It began the process of casting truth spells on the dwarves. Some of the creatures resisted its unholy magic and the monster had to cast the spells several times. When the chief was finished there was a reddish glow around each of the dwarves and they were looking very uncomfortable.

"Know this little dwarves, with the spells I have just cast on you, I can tell if you are lying. Each time you tell me a lie you will glow an even brighter shade of red. When you glow you will be eaten, do you understand?"

The more diplomatic of the dwarves stepped up. "We understand oh great leader of the noble Troglodytes. What do you want from us?"

"Don't give me that noble trash, my kind only wants to eat your kind. Dwarves in return only want to kill troglodytes on sight. Such is the way it should be, but there are things both groups can offer the other. My people don't like humans and I think sometimes your people don't like them either." The chieftain waved to attendants and they rolled out seven head-sized spheres of solid gold. "Do you recognize this metal?"

"It's gold of course. No dwarf in the world could fail to tell what that is. Why have you formed it into spheres?"

"This metal means little to my people. We melt it down and throw it off cliffs for the enjoyment of our little ones. As it falls to the water far below it forms into these spheres and creates a light show while falling. We have a great deal of these collected in several caverns. You do find these desirable don't you?"

"Some say gold is our life's blood. There isn't much that a dwarf wouldn't do for gold."

"Just as I thought. Now look at these." Once again the troglodyte waved its clawed hand and attendants brought out a collection of swords. "These are steel swords and you dwarves know all about these don't you?"

When the dwarves moved to pick up the weapons a band of twenty troglodytes appeared out of the darkness with javelins in their hands. The dwarves got the idea.

"From where I stand those look like human made longswords. The steel appears to be of average to poor quality. There is a lot of rust on the blades and soon they will all be useless unless they are taken better care of. Dwarves do make better weapons. We make swords that don't rust for years. Our swords rarely break in battle."

"Ah, that is just what I wanted to hear. Now for the question that might get you killed. How many of those spheres of gold would it take for a dwarven weapon

maker to make a magical steel sword that would be made especially to hurt humans?"

The dwarf thought for a long time before he answered. He thought about the magical truth spell that he could feel itching all over his skin. He thought about how good it would be to be freed at last from this hellhole. He also thought that he and his trapped brothers didn't have any special liking for humans.

"Four, no Five of those spheres would get you a fine steel longsword with magic inherent in the blade to deal with humans. Such a weapon would take roughly six months to make and three of those spheres would have to be paid in advance. Naturally, a dwarven smith would never consider making a weapon for a foe like you. The only way such a thing would happen is if some extraordinary act was done like freeing all of us to take your message to my people."

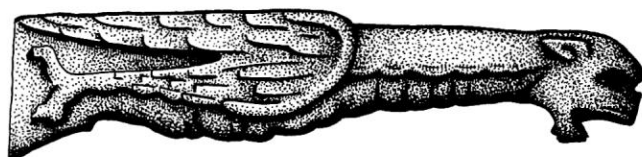
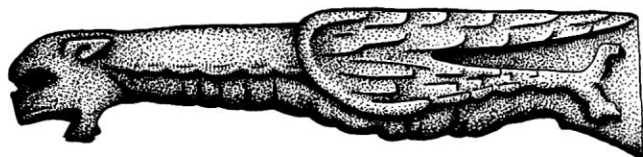
"My city would like to form a truce with all dwarves. We would promise never to hunt your kind as long as the truce exists. You would promise to make swords for us that we would use to fight the humans above ground. We will pay in these spheres at the price you have mentioned. Can such a truce be made?"

"I can't speak for my clan leaders. I can take your message to them and I think they will listen. There aren't so many dwarves in the world that we can afford to pass up on large amounts of gold. Free us and send a band of your best warriors with us and they will take back what ever message is formed by the dwarven council."

"An excellent idea. I'll also send enough of these gold spheres to pay for ten swords to be made. Maybe the gold will speak louder than my message."

So it came to pass that the nearby dwarven settlements didn't mind getting large amounts of gold to make swords for the Troglodytes. The sword's magic was such that the weapons were almost useless against dwarves. The next time a human raiding party came into the caverns of the lizards they were greeted by dozens of glowing green swords. The weapons worked great havoc on the invaders, such that word spread of a new kind of Troglodyte with new weapons and new tactics. It was a long time before the caverns and those creatures were bothered again, and that is another story. It also came to pass that a new wave of invasions swept through the land of man. No longer did the primitive troglodytes fight with flint tipped spears and javelins. Now they were using magical swords and the weapons did terrible damage on the flesh of all humans.

The very next time the chieftain of the troglodytes went above ground he was blasted to ash by his own gods. This act proved to the rest of the lizard men that the chieftain was on the right track and efforts were made to double the number of swords the dwarves made very year.



Rogue's Dagger

Endrin was a skilled maker of arrows. Many said there was elf's blood in his family history, but Endrin would only smile when he heard those words. He worked in his own small Fletcher's shop in the hamlet of Dragon's Bay. There was a large castle on the hill and the guardsmen there were his main customers. There were talented archers in the county that liked to come to him for arrows as well. Endrin was famous in several counties for his deer whistler arrows. He'd made a very specially shaped arrowhead that would emit a piercing whistle as it flew through the air. The whistle noise would freeze the deer.

One day he was working on some ash arrows when a stranger came into his shop. The cloaked man had an amazing bow across his shoulder. The silver metal plating the bow almost had a glow separate from the sun reflecting off of it. The stranger revealed himself to be an elf as Endrin saw his short white hair and pointed ears.

"Fletcher, I have great need for your arrows. Your fame has spread even into the deep woods where my people try to remain free."

"I don't usually get your kind around here, begging your pardon for me saying so. Why wouldn't you use the arrows of your own people?"

"We don't make the whistling arrow you are famous for." With that statement the elf took out two large bars of silver. "If we can come to an arrangement, I would like all the arrow heads made out of this moon silver, if you please. You can keep the remainder of these bars as payment for the arrowheads. Since you have admired my bow so much, I would gift you of it in payment for the arrows." With that the elf handed over the bow to the amazed hands of Endrin.

"This is too great a payment. Why, such a bow as this would be worth more than two hundred of those arrows."

"Done then. You will make me two hundred of your whistling arrows. Each will be tinged forest green and have white feathers for the fletching. Each will have moon silver for the special arrowheads you make. Do we have a bargain then?"

Endrin stuck out his hand. "Indeed we do and I thank you for the business."

It took several months for the Fletcher to finish the order. The elf archer would come in every few weeks and collect his special arrows. In all that time Endrin didn't try his new bow as he felt he hadn't earned it yet. The day came when he completed his 200th arrow and the elf came in well pleased with the work.

"Fletchers are great nobles among my kind. I would praise you by saying that they can't do the work that you do with your special whistling arrows. I would give you a

parting gift if you will." The elf laid a very unusual dagger on the table by the surprised Endrin. "There is a storm brewing between my kind and the human lord at the castle. He isn't a man of honor and his guardsmen are black hearted as well. They will all be dealt with so you will have need of this dagger and the bow soon. Peace be with you, Endrin the Fletcher, my people mean you no ill."

Endrin didn't know what to say, as the elf walked from his shop with the last of the arrows. He didn't have a good feeling in the pit of his stomach, however.

Never a political man, Endrin began to listen to what others were saying about the lord of the castle and his men. He felt foolish as he learned that the lord was evil and the people of his lands were suffering terribly. Then he heard of the guardsmen deaths. It seems the whistle would frighten a human as much as a deer. The next day his door burst open and the guardsmen pulled him away to the castle.

He sat quietly in the dungeon for three weeks with no trial and no news of why he was imprisoned. No guard would tell him why he was there. He was fed once a day and given water at night. His anger at the injustice of it all grew within him, darkening his heart.

Then one day a new prisoner was thrown in with him. He was a dirty little fellow who curled into a ball until the guards left in disgust.

"Tommy the Thief, I call myself and who would you be sir?" The little man held out his hand in friendship.

"I'm Endrin the Fletcher and I've been here for 21 days. I'm pleased to meet you Tommy."

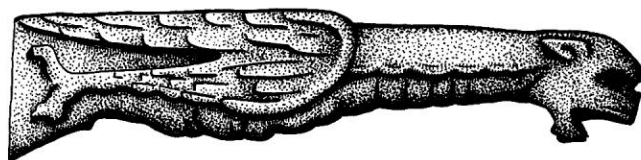
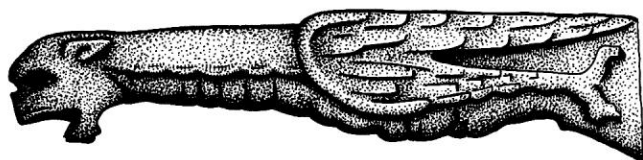
"Well we won't be here a day longer if you have some thin bit of metal on you. Those nasty thugs new enough about me to search for all my lock picks."

Endrin took out the slim whistling arrowhead he wore around his neck. It was the first one he'd ever made and he kept it as a lucky piece. He never told anyone it was shaped completely by mistake. If Tommy could put it to good use, it would turn out to be even luckier an item than Endrin had first thought.

"Awy this is just the thing, well done master Fletcher. This little item will get us out of here tonight if I 'av any say in this and I do."

"Even if you do open the door there are guards and castle walls to get past and over. How do we do that?"

"Well you have your skills and I have mine. First you have to realize that castles are made to keep people out and not stop people from leaving them. You and I will use some tricks I know and escape, but don't plan on going back to your pleasant life in the village. You'll be a marked man, but a marked man is better than a hanged one if you get my drift. Those whistling arrows of yours are causing quite a stir out and about. It seems some angry elves are putting them to unusually good use.



Now, while we are waiting for the shank of the night, let's practice a few skills I have. You see I'm dirty for a reason, and let's just make you the same way."

Desperation made Endrin a very good learner. He was extremely tired of the injustice done to him. As a hunter, he already had some skills at moving silently and hiding in any shadow, but he didn't hold a candle to Tommy and learned much more as the hours went on. In the darkest part of the night the door clicked open.

"You really need to teach me how to do that."

"Well my new found ally, that won't be a problem as we will have a lot of time together in the next few days at any rate. Let's away and see how many guards we can slip past before you have to use those great big fists of yours."

Moving through the castle like wraiths they slipped past sleeping guards and were over the wall before the moon had set. Rushing to the Fletcher's shop they discovered the door destroyed and the place ransacked.

"Oooo Wee, they've cleaned you out my friend. That's a bit of bad luck."

"I'd say the luck was still on our side. My da always told me to have a bit set aside, secret like against a rainy day. While it isn't raining and it isn't day, but it is a good time to open it up." The side of Endrin's fireplace opened showing a man-sized alcove. The elf bow and dagger lay there with a large pack and a sack of coins.

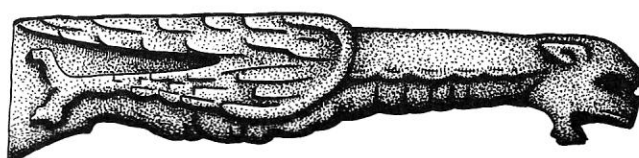
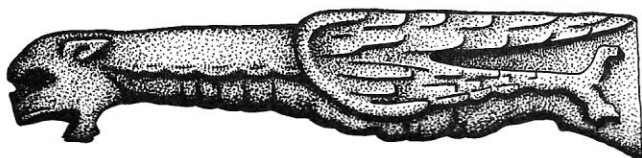
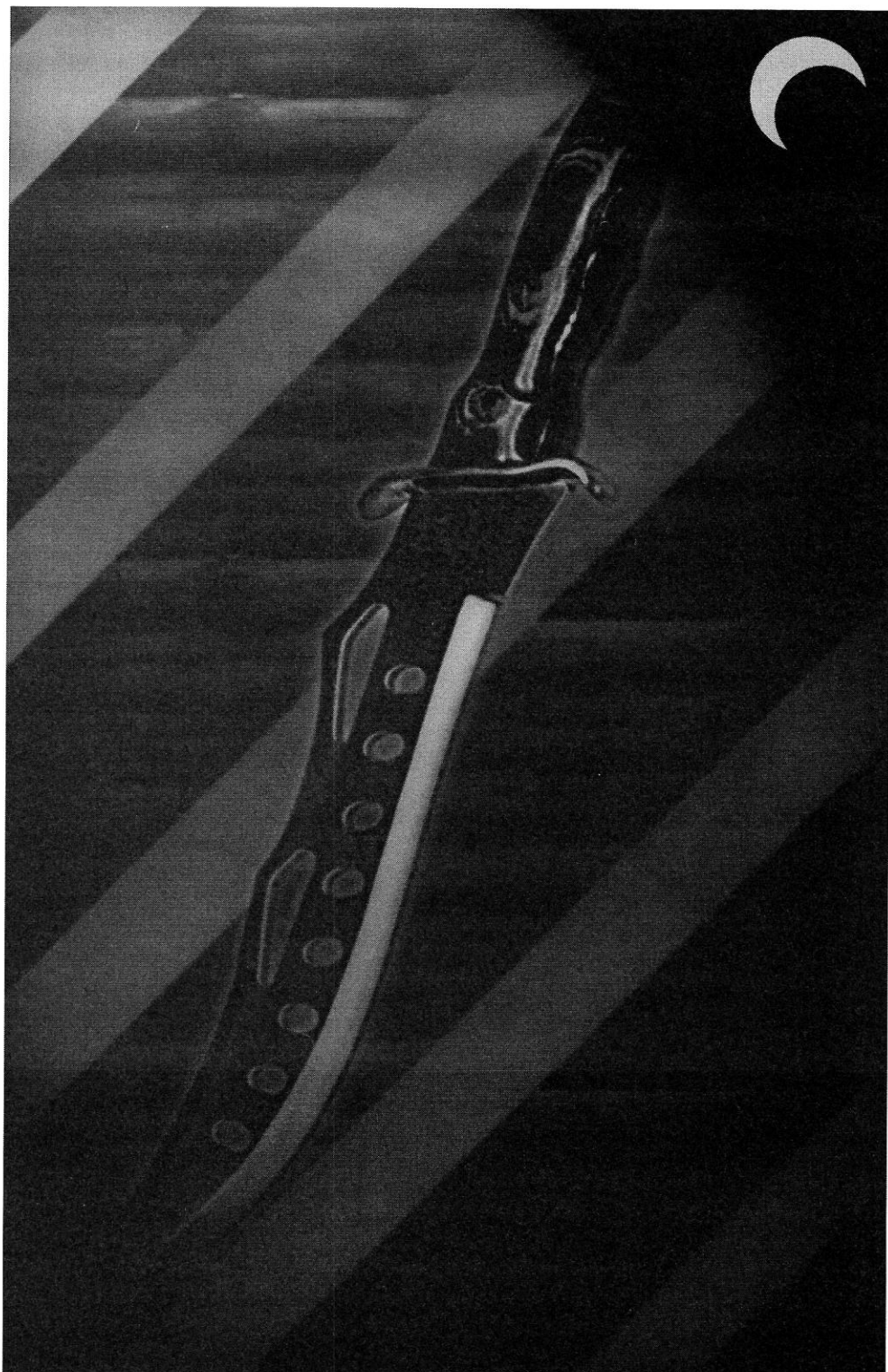
Endrin tossed the dagger to Tommy who held the blade up in wonder as he never held anything so fine in his life.

"I'm gifting you that Tommy for getting me out of the castle. I'm going into the forest where a few friends are working the roads up to the castle. I never really appreciated them until now, but they were boyhood friends and I helped them against my better judgment. You can come

along if you will, what say you?"

"I'm with you man of hidden talents. Let's pay back a few debts the lord of the castle has built up."

Endrin and Tommy were to become legends in their day, but that is of course a tale told at another time.



Ren's Dagger 'o Flying

Ren 'o the Blade's younger years were spent learning to become a thief. In that learning process he spent a lot of time on the roofs of the city. Since DragonKind is a highly magical city there were a lot of real and fake gargoyles doing their own thing on the roofs of the city. Ren learned to really hate gargoyles.

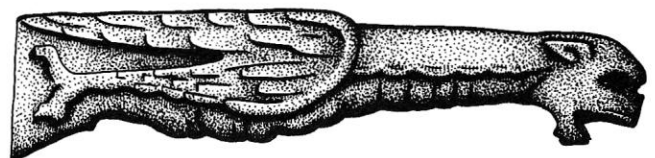
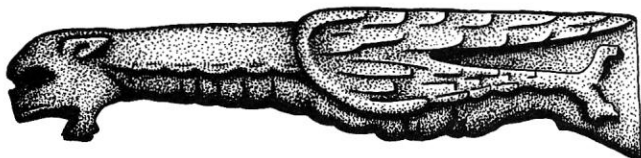
Stone gargoyles serve as rain spouts for the water that runs off the roofs. That's about the only way you can tell a real gargoyle from a constructed one. Of course to make that determination it must be raining. Wet thieves are not happy thieves. All of the experienced thieves of the city knew where the real gargoyles hung out, but they weren't

telling. They considered it their duty to force the new, up and coming thieves to learn the way they did, by getting very wet on the slippery moss covered roof slates of the city.

It seems the gargoyles of the city had several agreements going with the city guard and the wizards of DragonKind. They, being the gargoyles, would be tolerated if they never swooped down and ate the citizens of the city off the streets. They could guard the roofs and outer towers of the various wizard's mansions and even clerical temples, but they weren't allowed in any building. There were plenty of odd creatures and thieves for the stony monsters to munch on with this agreement in mind. It was often said the gargoyles of DragonKind were the fattest gargoyles on the prime material plane. None of this

helped Ren's cause of course.

The problem of gargoyles and their delight in clawing, biting, and goring thieves didn't really strike Ren as serious until his second year of thieving. He and a rather attractive red headed female thief were casing a mansion of a lord on the south side of town. Ren had been with Elissia for two months now and was learning a lot from her and greatly enjoying their off duty time together. They were finding lots of good entry points on the roof of the mansion when suddenly three gargoyles broke from their positions on the roof and tore Elissia limb from limb. She didn't even get a chance to scream. Ren was on the other side of the roof and could only watch in horror at what the monsters did with her. Even if he had been by her side he had nothing that could fight off those monsters. Ren slunk away into the night and made a silent vow to do something about gargoyles and



that mansion's gargoyles in particular.

In the next year he didn't work the roofs of the city. He learned to open locks and pick pockets and he learned about gargoyles. There were several of the monsters to be found in the city's zoo and the keepers were more than happy to talk about their stony inmates.

"You'll rarely find only one of them as they like to fly in packs of three, they do" one keeper told Ren.

"Oh and they don't really need to eat, but they love to rip and tear living flesh up," said another.

"They like the breezy days as still air really slows them down with their flying. And you never see them not goring and slashing their prey. Its like they have to put their horns in anything they are attacking and those curved horns make very distinctive patterns on the body."

"They aren't nearly as strong as they look and they are fiercely careful of their wings which is why they don't care to go into small places or into houses and chambers."

Ren made mental notes of all of the things he was hearing and passed the zookeepers more ale to keep them talking.

"Oh, and the water spout thing is a good way to tell if they are real or not, but if you watch them carefully, you can also see their neck muscles move. They can't hide the big vessels in their necks and those must be moving all the time."

Ren also started saving half of his various takes for the making of some magical blades. Thieves were always making this magical sword or that magical dagger and there were several skilled weapons smiths in the town. One of the best was a dwarf on the lower east side of town. After Ren told the dwarf what he wanted the smith said the work would be no problem but he would need a living gargoyle for every one of the blades Ren wanted. The dwarf named a price and Ren paid in gold for the three blades.

One year to the day that Elissia was killed, bodies began appearing around the streets of the lord's manor. The bodies all had strange gore tears in them. As the crowds would gather around the bodies the same whis-pers would spread through the crowd.

"Could it be gargoyles again?"

"Those certainly look like gargoyle gore tears to me."

"Those damned gargoyles there ought to be a law against them."

"The city guard should do something about them, no one is safe in the streets."

Ren would continue to spread these little rumors until the body was cleared away.

Ren was especially proud of the ruined lord's carriage. It was at sunset when the lord rode in his carriage to a favorite gambling inn several streets away. On that night as the carriage was leaving the manor a body all gored up

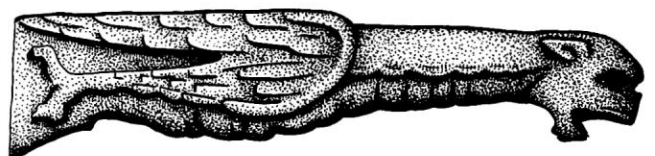
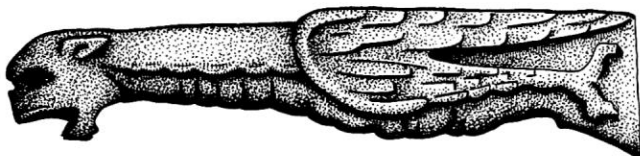
fell from the roof and onto and through the top of the carriage onto the lap of the very surprised lord. It ruined his lace shirt it did. No one but the three gargoyles on the roof knew that Ren had thrown the body from the building on the opposite street. As the up roar started below Ren raised his fist to the three gargoyles he knew could see him very well from their perch. Slipping away in the approaching darkness his revenge hadn't even started yet. Naturally, the city guard and wizards were called in to end the lord's problem. Instead of killing the three gargoyles this city guard insisted on taking them alive. The creatures were captured and brought to a certain dwarf's weapon smith shop and imprisoned in a secret basement room. The cost of this was an unusually large sum. It wasn't considered a bribe by the city watch as they did get rid of the gargoyles for the lord and the dwarf assured them that the monsters would be killed. They walked away pleased and although Ren's pocket was much lighter he was more than satisfied with the bargain as well.

It took six more days to draw the essences from the gargoyles and create the enchanted blades. Ren watched every step of the killing and creation, paying extra for the privilege of looking over the dwarf's shoulder. When it was all done he had three gleaming blades. They were a little larger than he was used to for daggers, but their magic was evident in the crystal handle and the miniature gargoyle wings for the cross guards.

"I usually test such weapons out myself to make sure of their magical strength. Shall I order several gargoyles for the tests? It should only a few weeks to capture some of the monsters."

"No, good smith. I will want to test these blades out myself and if there are any problems I won't be bothering you, as I will be dead. Thank you for your good work and I will tell my friends of your quality." Ren paid the dwarf a bonus and walked out of the shop with the weapons already hidden on his person.

For the next three months the city streets were bombarded with a hail of falling gargoyles. There were few thieves on the prime material plane that could throw a dagger better than Ren 'o the Blade. It got so the administrators of the city decided they really needed to do something about the menace of dead gargoyles falling out of the sky. Wizards were commissioned to find the real gargoyles among the stone ones and magically rid the city of the menace. A strange thing happened when this was announced to the citizens of the city. Maps of the roofs began showing up on the door to DragonKind's city hall. The maps clearly marked roofs with clutches of living gargoyles. In just two months after the commission was made the city was free of all the gargoyles and the monsters never came to the city again.



Standardbearer

A story is told of a contest among the giants. In the days when humans had not yet risen up and conquered so much of the world, the giants walked with power and made war against all their enemies, both within giant-kind and without. They ruled earth and sky with great might and great pride.

Among the giants, the weaponsmiths were highly honored artisans. Some were even priests and dreamspeakers. Among a prideful race, the weaponmakers were often the most prideful. A few had true wisdom, such as the storm giant weaponsmith and sage, Esk Artl Ymreth, but most were thoughtless and destructive in their creation of ever more deadly weapons. They often argued among themselves over petty matters, and constantly strove to create increasingly dangerous weapons. Though they already had weapons so lethal that they could kill other giants with one blow (not to mention members of the smaller races who were growing up underfoot), the weaponsmiths always strove to make more and deadlier weapons.

It happened that one day, the giantish weaponsmiths took to comparing the destructive power of their numerous creations. They fell to arguing among themselves about who was the greatest weaponsmith, and who had made the most destructive weapons. As their argument intensified, they agreed to have a contest among themselves. They made a contest to see who among the giantish races could craft the most dangerous weapon.

The hill giants, brutish and uncultured, but not without cunning, carved a very sharp boulder. Special protrusions all around its girth could kill in spectacularly gory ways. Then, they kidnapped a wizard and forced him to enchant the boulder so that it would seek out a thrower's enemy within 100 yards and smash its skull. Then the rock would return to its thrower's hand, ready to strike again.

The stone giants made a club of solid granite. With their own magicians, they made the stone of the club unbreakable. When struck against the ground, the mighty club shook the ground, opening rifts. Its shockwave drove burrowing creatures to the surface while surface dwellers for hundreds of yards around were knocked to the ground, stunned, helpless.

The frost giants created an icy, double-ended sword that left a trail of frost in its wake. Simply fighting a giant with this sword in melee was a losing proposition. Anyone even standing near the wielder became slowed and chilled, eventually frozen solid by its icy trail. An opponent who felt the bit of the bitter cold blade itself

was rendered instantly frozen and an easy mark for destruction by the blade's wielder.

The fire giants created an enormous maul made of pure elemental fire. The fire burned everything it touched — enemies, rocks, iron, mithril, even water — all burst into flames at the strike of the maul. Anything that touched the maul burned until it was ashes. Only the protection of specially made gloves allowed the fire giants to wield the immolating maul, and it could only be safely set down in fire or lava.

The cloud giants went to their forge in the clouds and hammered out living lightning. This living lightning bolt could be hurled as a javelin. It would fly toward any foe at any distance and strike repeatedly until the enemy died. The lightning killed its target so thoroughly that no remains were left behind, not even ashes. It killed not just an opponent's body, but also its spirit, preventing it from ever being raised. Further, the living lightning also killed or destroyed whatever its target loved in life, utterly annihilating any good that might have come from the target's work or legacy.

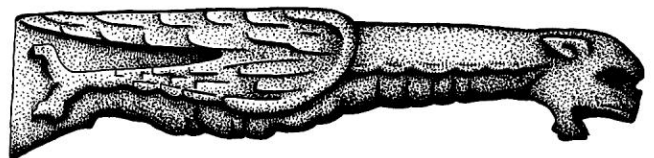
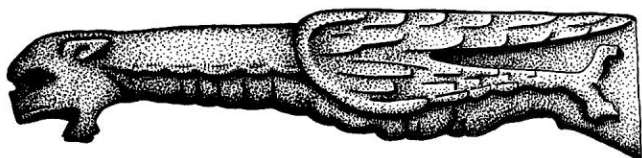
Esk Artl Ymreth, the weaponsmith and sage, was the greatest of the storm giant smiths. His fellow giants came to him for aid in the competition. After explaining the nature and origin of the contest, and the inventively brutal machinations of the other weaponsmiths, Ymreth would not have any part of it. "The weapons we have are dangerous enough," he would say. "We do not need new ways to bring ruin to each other."

Nevertheless, the storm giants were persistent. They implored him to make a weapon that would defend their honor among giants. They told stories of the other giants' creations. They begged him to be an ambassador of his own race. They accused him of being a traitor for his non-compliance.

Finally, Esk Artl tired of their daily visits to implore him to create a supremely dangerous weapon. He agreed, and bid them leave him alone for a thousand days while he worked. Only the weaponsmith's assistants saw him during the time. The loud hisses and mountain-shaking clangs commonly made by a giant weaponsmith at work were not heard during the thousand days. Rather, a soft, steady clink-clink-clink could be heard by those with the sharpest of ears who stood outside Ymreth's door.

When the thousand days had passed, all the weaponsmiths appeared before the judgment bench, each with his or her own weapon of terrible destruction. Great palanquins and long entourages accompanied all the other weapons and their creators. Esk Artl Ymreth, however, arrived alone, carrying only his usual giant's sack.

The other giants showed off the awesome might of their creations, and each appeared more fantastic and awe-



inspiring than the last. Then it was Ymreth's turn. When he approached the bench, he reached into his sack and withdrew a bundle as long as his finger. He placed it gingerly on the table before the council, and unwrapped it with careful fingers. Inside was a gleaming knife with clean lines and a wicked tip.

"I call the blade, Standardbearer," he said in a rumbling voice like a coming storm. "Giants are strong, and we make our own destinies in the sight of our gods. But the humans of the earth have more power than we. Perhaps at one time it was not so, but now it is true. They travel to lands we dare not, and make their homes there. They meddle with forces more powerful than is wise, and some few have truck with the gods themselves. They have pride to rival that of the giants, yet they have no pride so great that it will not bow before power. If ever they massed arms against us, they would slay every giant from above or below land."

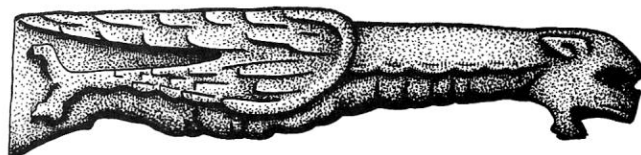
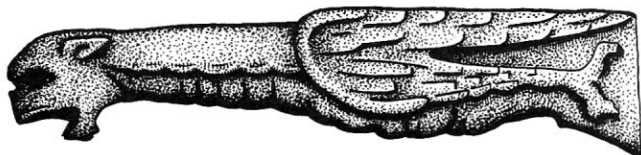
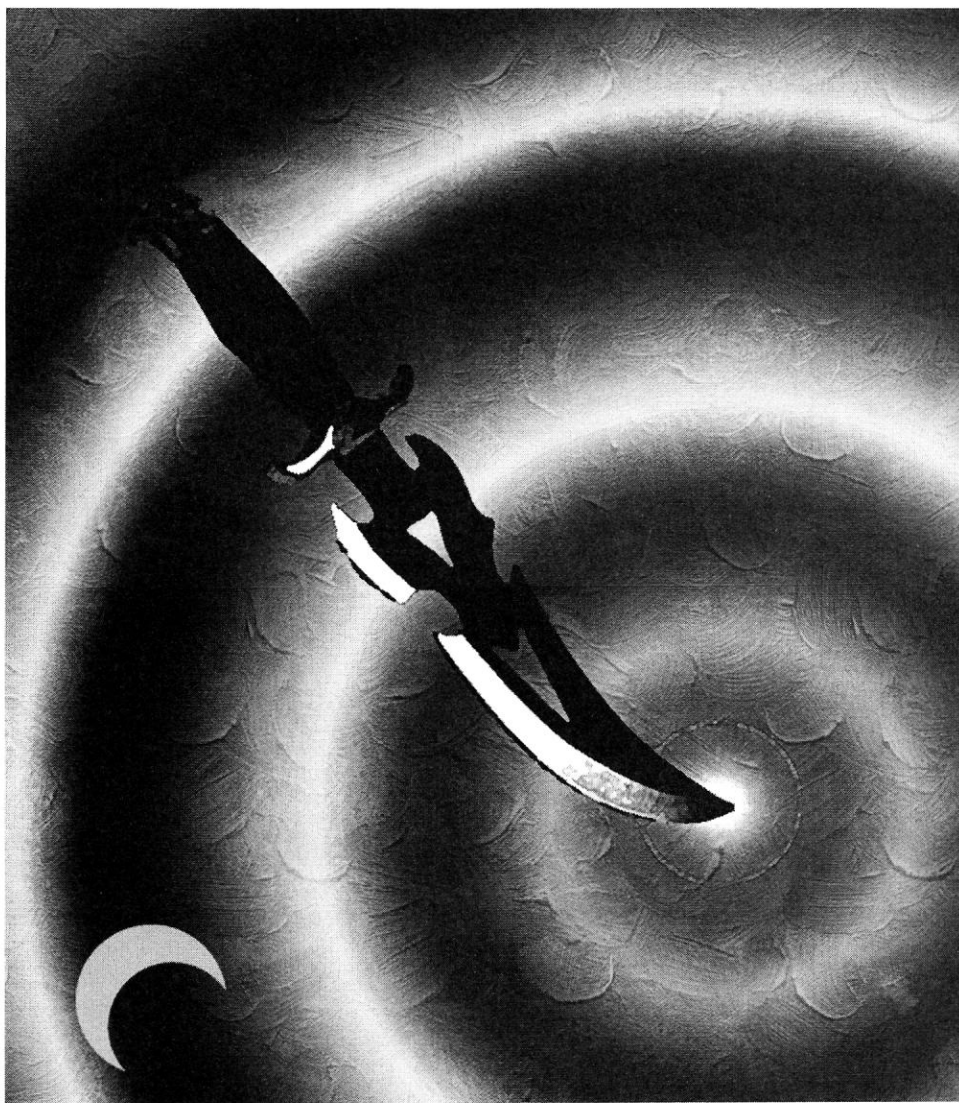
"Our safety from their numbers and power is their divisiveness. They quarrel among themselves, and rarely is one collection of humans so strong or so righteous that another collection of humans does not attempt to drag them down. What would we suffer if they ever stopped quarrelling among themselves? United humanity would be the most destructive force we have ever seen."

"This knife then, Standardbearer, can find leaders among humanity. It will teach them to fight, and teach them to lead. And when it raises up a leader, it will allow that leader to bind other humans' hearts to him or her. The leader who wields this knife will never be disobeyed by one who has sworn fealty. A leader who holds Standardbearer is not undefeatable, but an enemy must defeat every one of the leader's followers before they will allow even the slightest hair on his or her head to be harmed."

"Any human leader who wields Standardbearer, and who unites humanity against the giants will crush us. Nothing will be beyond their reach. They will not simply wipe all giantish creatures out, but even our creations and memories will be as a half-forgotten dream among the humans of successive generations."

"This is the weapon I have made. A weapon not meant for giant hands, but for the most dangerous of our potential enemies. Here is your weapon of power. Do not let it out of your sight if you value your lives and the lives of your children and your grandchildren."

The room was hushed. Though the hill giants did not understand all of what Esk Artl has spoken, they knew his grim demeanor. Some other giants snorted in disbelief, but the wisest and most experienced among giant-kind shuddered and were fearful at the horrible weapon that Ymreth had wrought. The rulers among the giants commanded that it be hidden away, deep in the earth, under constant vigil, where humans would never find it or learn of it. And there it has stayed, the secret dread of giants throughout the ages.



Hobgoblin Soldier's Knife

The Korglamiyel army of hobgoblins is as fierce and disciplined as any warband. However, those schooled in the lore of the land know when the Korglamiyel army has fought, compared to another warband of their kin. The battlefield is littered with sharp knives, all of the same make.

Each recruit of the Korglamiyel army of hobgoblins is issued a knife when knife training commences. The knife is of masterwork quality, and the excellence of design and creation shows in every malicious crevice in the metal. Beyond the quality of craftsmanship however, the knives are visually indistinct. Hundreds of knives are issued every year to Korglamiyel recruits.

Knife combat is an integral part of Korglamiyel army training, and hobgoblins trained in this army receive Weapon Focus (knife) rather than Alertness as their default feat. Each batch of new recruits is told the following litany, and must memorize it before beginning knife combat training. Recruits then recite the litany in unison before each day's training begins.

This knife is a symbol of my prowess. Knowing how fierce, how strong, and how vicious I am, the god of goblins, Bloodspiller, vowed that this knife and no other would be mine, a mirror of my fighting spirit.

This knife is a symbol of my discipline. When my knife is dirty, I am unclean. When my knife is dull, I am weak. When my knife is out of reach, I am vulnerable.

This knife is my symbol of station. When my knife fells a foe, I rise as a soldier. When I advance, my knife advances.

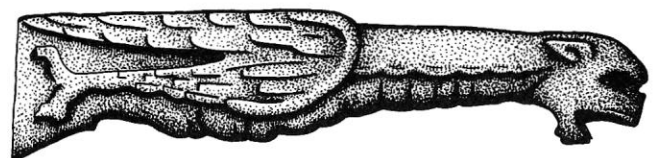
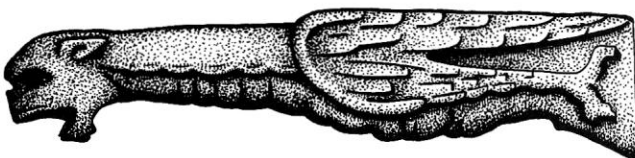
This knife is a symbol of my will to kill. When I slay a foe, my knife grows stronger and sharper, as I do.

My duty is clear as a soldier and as a hobgoblin. I have been given a killing gift. It is mine and meant for me to kill with. I must keep my knife clean. I must keep my knife sharp. I must keep my knife nearby. I will use other weapons, but my knife will always be my partner and protector. I must treat it

with the respect and order that I give to a fellow soldier.

This would only be a disturbing quasi-religious ritual if not for the magic invested in every knife. The knife of a new recruit radiates only the faintest of Transmutation magic, and has no magical abilities or bonuses. However, as the hobgoblin grows in experience, so does his knife.

Hobgoblins who survive enough battles and show ambition are eventually promoted. Soon after, that hobgoblin's knife is no longer indistinct from his fellow soldiers' knives. A promoted Korglamiyel can see his knife change in shape and color over a matter of days. Along



with physical manifestations, a knife's true magical nature begins to appear. The knife literally becomes a superior weapon, not just in the hands of its owner, but also in appearance and magical enhancement.

When a hobgoblin is promoted to lieutenant, the knife becomes a +1 weapon. When the new officer is promoted to captain, the knife takes on another magical quality, consistent with the user's personality and fighting style. A careful fighter's knife becomes keen or a defender, a strong fighter's knife gains mighty cleaving, and the knife of a hobgoblin who specializes in throwing gains the returning ability. More esoteric magic abilities sometimes appear on hobgoblins with strong personalities, such as fire, electricity, or cold. As the soldier continues to advance through the ranks, to major and general, the knife becomes even stronger and more powerful.

A hobgoblin of any level almost certainly uses more damaging weapons in his or her arsenal. Any serious warrior knows that a knife is no substitute for a sword or spear when these longer, stronger weapons are available. But many a foe of the Korglamiyel army has died surprised at the sudden appearance of a sharp, bright knife that seems to lunge with a will of its own.

Regardless of how different or how powerful the knives become, a trained weaponsmith can always tell whether a knife is a Korglamiyel knife. To the trained eye, a successful DC 15 Craft (weaponsmith) check reveals that a knife is a Korglamiyel knife. The workmanship is always the same, even if the knives look completely different.

Korglamiyel hobgoblins do not talk about where their knives come from, beyond reverent mention of "the Bloodspiller's Forge." "Bloodspiller" is not a common name for the god of goblins and hobgoblins, though their religious iconography of Bloodspiller does bear some resemblance to the more typical representations of the goblin god.

Bloodspiller's true identity is known only the highest ranking members of the army. These officers have never been captured or spied upon, and their knowledge remains hidden within their ranks thanks to mysterious enchantments, thought to be beyond hobgoblin capability.

Bloodspiller, and the knives' true origin, is a gelugon named Hezburit. Hezburit has a legion of devil smiths at work, creating thousands of knives every year in infernal forges. Decades ago, the Korglamiyel commander-in-chief, Korglamiyel Feareater, made a pact with Hezburit. The devil would arm and protect Feareater's warband. In return, the mighty army of hobgoblins would serve as Hezburit's shock troops and occupying army when the day came that he chose to exert his will on the material plane.

Hezburit has kept his end of the pact by dispensing occasional baatezu help in the army's campaigns, and

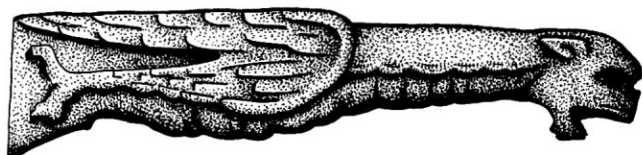
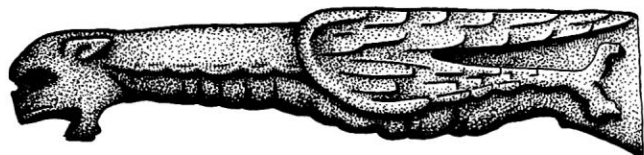
providing each soldier with a weapon. In return, the Korglamiyel army has been on a recruitment drive to serve as the devil's tools on the material plane. For several decades, the Korglamiyel have been warring on other hobgoblin warbands. The Korglamiyel slay all adults, but bring the children up as Korglamiyel soldiers. When a young hobgoblin reaches fighting age, he or she is given a knife, and taught the litany. Since the common races tend to ignore the machinations of evil humanoids as long as they stay underground or in the mountains, few outside of hobgoblin territory know of this massive consolidation of power. A small number of rangers have tried to warn the local rulers in the lands around the Korglamiyel area, but their warnings have gone unheeded.

Hezburit's plan is world domination. He knows he will need a very large army, of both devils and native troops. So while he gathers the infernal power he needs, and secures a way to get them to the material plane, he watches over and uses the Korglamiyel army as his eyes. Hezburit has a network of agents throughout the nations, many of whom serve unknowingly. One of his chief means of learning about the material world is through the knives he supplies to his hobgoblin army. He may use any knife as a scrying device, seeing everything in a 10-foot radius of any knife. This means he usually spends time watching hobgoblins, and allows him to see the outcome of nearly any battle waged by his troops.

Perhaps even more importantly, adventurers and other scavengers often pick up the magic knives from slain Korglamiyel hobgoblins to keep or sell. In this way, Hezburit's "sharp eyes" spread throughout the world. He has even been known to advise Korglamiyel generals into fighting a losing battle as an attempt to get one of his scrying knives into enemy camps as spoils.

Once Hezburit has all the intelligence and soldiers he believes he needs, he will march them forward to take over the world, one nation at a time. With the world in his clutches, Hezburit then plans to either ransom the world back to some of the good gods, or simply use the power in the world to storm the good planes themselves, in a bid to rule the entire universe.

Korglamiyel hobgoblins are not religious fanatics, but they have a firm belief in their god, Bloodspiller, and their service to him. If the rank and file knew they were not serving the goblin god, but an infernal devil lord, they might be less anxious to take part in some of the activities they are normally ordered to. As highly disciplined soldiers, the Korglamiyel are not likely to disobey orders from a superior. But if the deceit were revealed to the army, the dissention would be sown into the ranks. A powerful army might be scattered back into its component warbands, and the gelugon's plans for world power would be destroyed.



The Sword of Worlds

War in and between the planes has raged since the dawn of time. In such wars, the advantage lies with races that can form their own gates, bridges between worlds, allowing them to traverse the immeasurable distances and summon their allies without assistance. Races without such abilities must rely in individuals who have spent many years learning magics of the highest order, leaving their armies vulnerable to the vagaries of fate.

The men of Chaflay were one such group, locked in a long-standing conflict with the Tanar'ri but forced most often to remain on the defensive by a dearth of skilled magi, unable to counterattack the enemy strongholds. Millennia ago, the magi Colethandross sought to stem the tide and give his people a means of taking the war to the enemy. He set about creating a series of enchanted items whose primary function was the creation of Gates to other planar realms, allowing the wielders to transport himself and associates without the need for a senior magus.

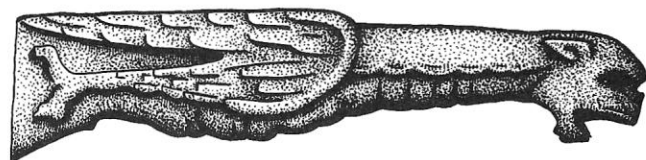
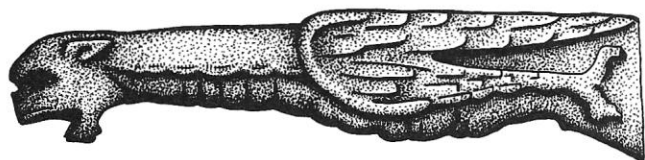
Colethandross wrought rings and bracers, necklaces and helms, and while they all functioned to some degree, the magus was unhappy with the result, most lacking the precision or duration of a true gate spell. In desperation, he turned to the legendary smith Jovalis and together they created a sword of power into which the magus bound his strongest spells. The forging was long and hard but, at last, Colethandross believed the work was completed, powers of interplanar travel bound into the bright steel and charms of Demonbane embedded in the blade. Summoning the warband of Althar'Kor, his longstanding ally, he held the sword aloft and called upon its power, seeking to open a gate to the Tanar'ri fortress of Kalain. Magic swirled around the blade and space distorted before the magus. A gate began to form but was unstable, one instant growing and the next contracting upon itself. With a bright flash and a loud retort, the portal imploded, the detonation throwing the assembled warriors and magi to the ground.

Before they could recover, the assembled warband found themselves under attack. Somehow, a Vrock had crossed through the portal and set about the stunned throng. Many Chaflay warriors fell before the onslaught, struggling to mount an effective defense. Dazed and unable to call upon his most powerful magics, Colethandross fell before the Tanar'ri's claws, the sword he had forged landing at his feet. Althar'Kor was hard pressed and forced to retreat, stumbling over his friend's body as he did so. He fell heavily, his sword skittering away. The Vrock leaped toward him and the warrior-lord reached out for the nearest weapon, Colethandross'

dropped sword. As the demon pounced, Althar'Kor raised the blade and impaled the surprised Outsider. Already wounded, the demonbane sword took the life of the Tanar'ri and as it did so, Althar'Kor felt power surge through the weapon. Focusing his mind on Kalain, he called his warriors to him and raised the blade. A gate shimmered into existence, large and stable, the magics powered by the life force of the slain demon. He led the warriors across the bridge and into the heart of the Tanar'ri citadel, cutting a swathe through the surprised and ill-prepared defenders.

The Battle of Kalain was the first Chaflay victory in the war against the Tanar'ri, but far from the last. Althar'Kor, and later his sons, used the power of the sword to stage surprise raids against the foe, striking at widely dispersed targets and forcing the enemy onto the defensive. The Sword of Worlds, as it was known, became a symbol of hope for Chaflay, though efforts to replicate its powers by other magi came to naught. The sword's power brought hope of the people and fear to the Tanar'ri. Confidence grew as success followed success, but eventually the sword's wielders became overconfident and paid the price. Believing himself invincible, Althar'Kor's grandson, Baltha'Kor, led an assault on the lair of the demon lord Titalus, quickly finding his troops outmatched. Locked in a duel with the Tanar'ri lord, Baltha'Kor was unable to open a gate through which to escape. He and his men were slain and their possessions, including the Sword of Worlds, taken as trophies by the demons. Deprived of the sword's powers, Chaflay was doomed and survived only five more years before being overrun, its lands now a demon-infested realm.

The sword languished in Titalus' vaults for centuries, the demon lord taking solace in the fact the sword he called Demonbiter was safely locked away from those who would use it against the Tanar'ri. Eventually the significance of the weapon was lost, its demonbane abilities ensconced in Tanar'ri legend but its gating powers forgotten. Some centuries after the fall of Chaflay, an ambitious Marilith sought to usurp Titalus' position and managed to retrieve Demonbiter as part of his scheme. A freelance half-elven rogue, Rynn Khor, was employed to carry the weapon — no tanar'ri could lift Demonbiter without injury — and became established as one of Titalus' mortal retainers. The appointed time of the coup arrived and the rebels launched their assault. Rynn remained "loyal" to Titalus and helped secure the palace, all the while searching for an opportunity to strike down the demon-lord. Chancing upon Titalus after a planning session, the would-be assassin struck, only to find his treachery anticipated. Rynn barely escaped with his life, fleeing through the warped corridors in search of his allies. A minor demon blocked his path and Rynn cut it down, all the

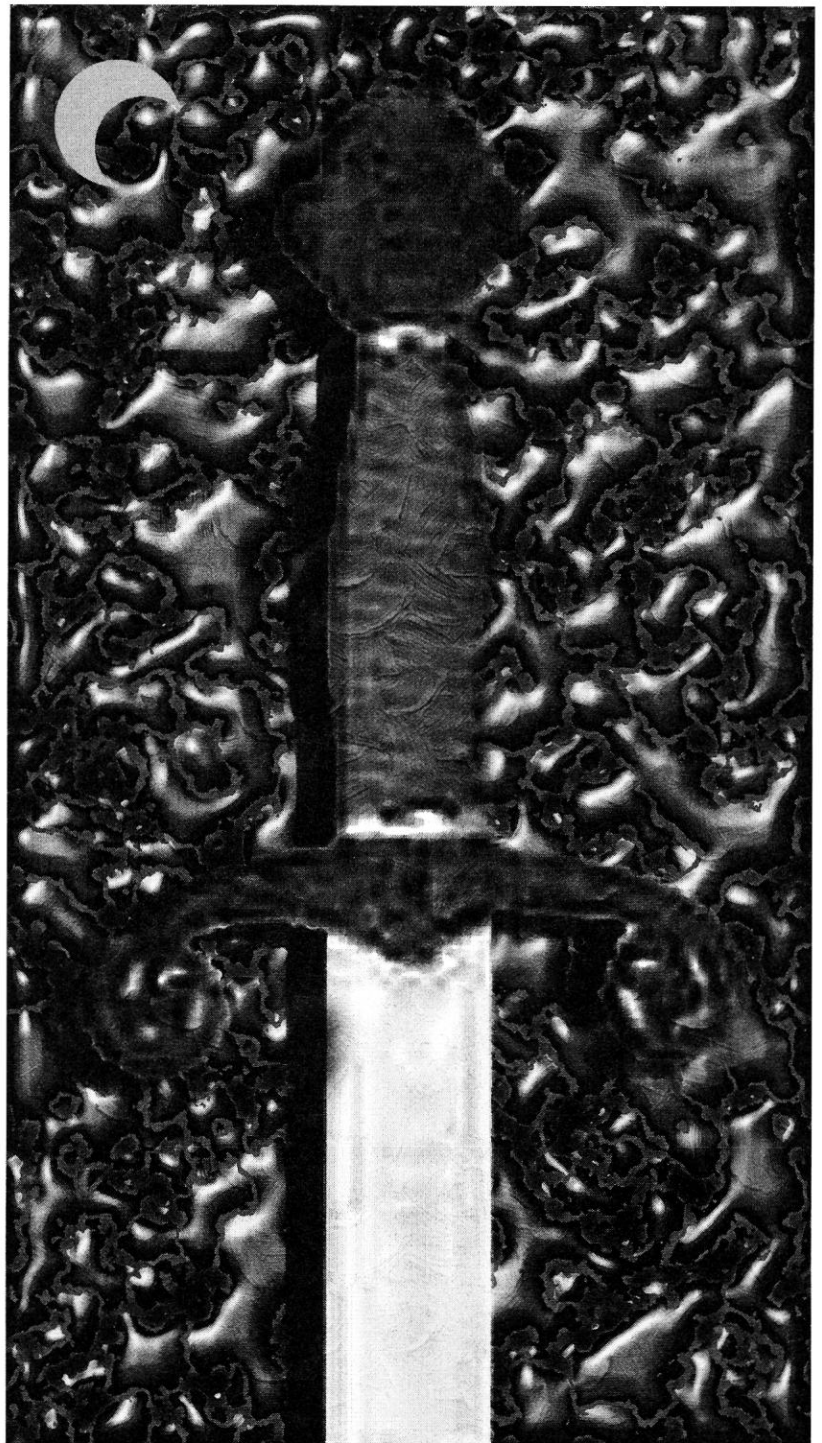


while wishing he were home. To his surprise, a portal shimmered into existence before him and, stepping through, Rynn found himself back in the Elven lands.

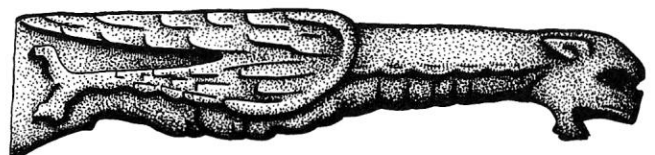
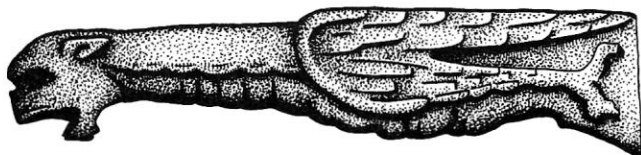
In the months that followed, trial and error taught Rynn the sword's powers and he learned to use them to further his own career. By means of an Orb of Scrying and the Sword of Worlds, he was able (albeit in a roundabout manner, often via other planes) to defeat most security measures and carry out missions of thievery or murder. Occasionally, he will also accept commissions to transport an individual or group to another plane though he is wary of such tasks as they require him to accept the presence of others who may be in the employ of his enemies. Cold and calculating, the amoral assassin has few qualms about the slaying required to power the sword and the provision of a suitable victim is part of the fee for his services, something that has caused a number of prospective employers to balk.

In the 10 years since obtaining the sword, Rynn has earned a reputation for efficiency and success, willing to undertake even the most challenging tasks, providing the remuneration is right. Several clients have sought to betray the assassin, only to find his skills and powers turned against them. After a particularly gruesome demonstration involving a perfidious merchant in Tourville, the attempts to cheat him have decreased markedly. Rynn is willing to work for almost any employer who can meet his fee, though he is very wary of working with Tanar'ri and other denizens of the outer plains. On two separate occasions, contracts have been used to lure him into an ambush in which Titalus or one of his associates has sought to wreak their revenge. Both times the assassin's natural wariness and advance planning allowed him to escape the trap, on the second occasion prompting him to send the head of his "employer" to the demon-lord as a reproach.

The current location of the sword and its bearer are hard to predict, with constant movement the key to Rynn's surviving the demons sent against him. He leaps from continent to continent and world to world in the same manner that others journey between towns, never residing in one place for more than a few days. He has built up a network of contacts throughout the planes who provide him with equipment and refuge and who provide a means of communication. One, the dark sorceress Kalith



of Rhalto, is reputed to be Rynn's lover and has accompanied him on several contracts, providing additional magical prowess. Their relationship is tempestuous though each sees the other as one of the few trustworthy individuals in a universe of enemies.



Master Colnar's Dueling Sword

— Excerpted from *"Shining Silver, a history of dueling in the Imperial Era"*

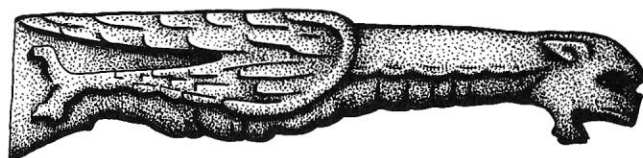
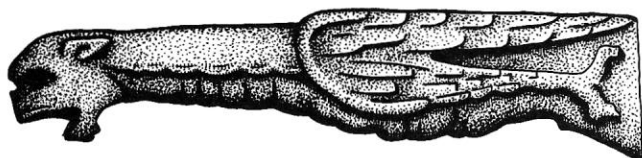
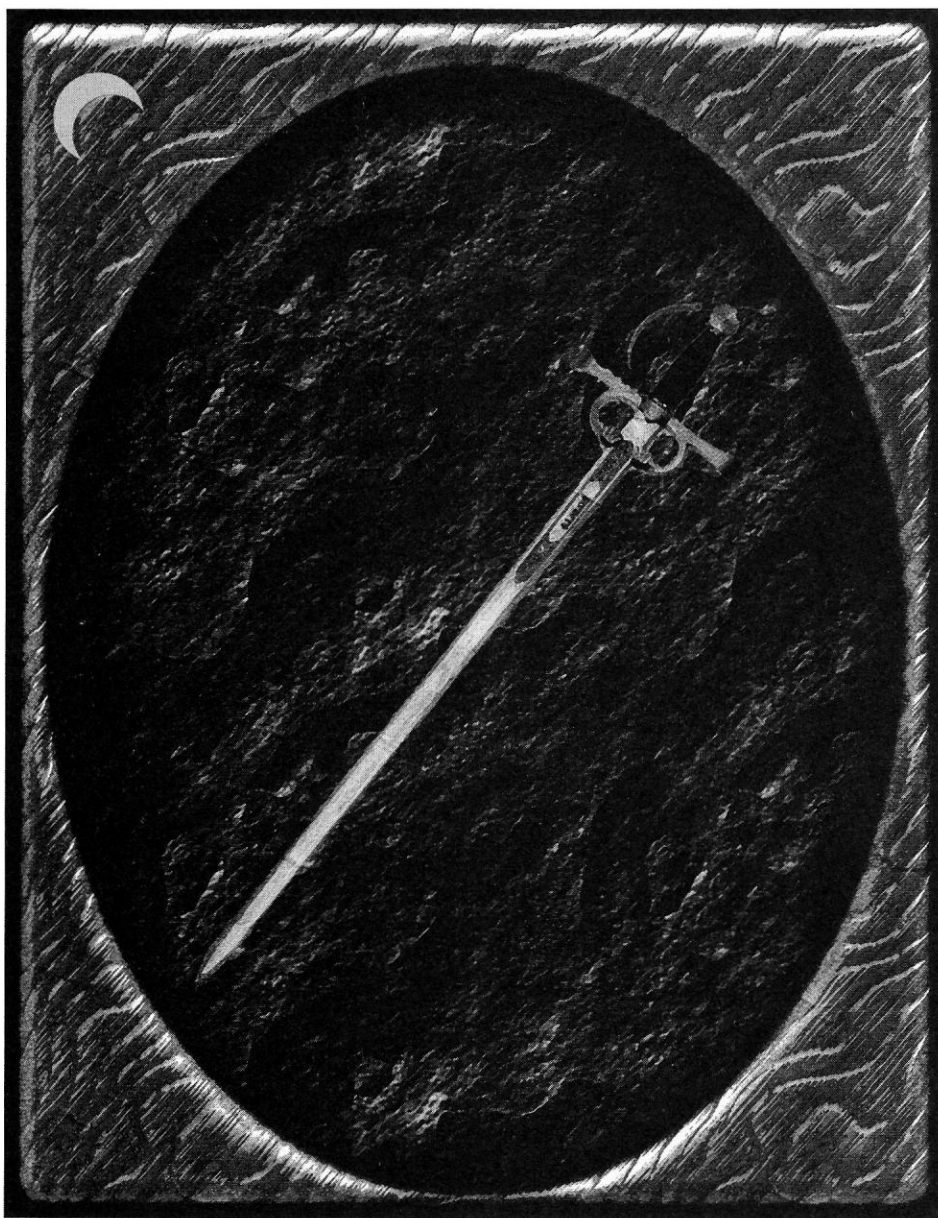
"The dueling rules of the Duara'coa developed in the early years of the Empire were a means of limiting bloodshed in a society that prized honor and status above all things. Before the creation of the Duara'coa, blood feuds were common, lines of vendetta often lasted for generations and frequently spiraled out of control. It was not unheard of for an argument about seating arrangements at a formal banquet to rapidly escalate from a war of

words into street battles. The Imperial Praetorians (before their disbandment following the Janacek Crisis) were often called upon to separate the factions, often sustaining serious injuries as the combatants sought to continue their feuds. Only after the Feder Incident, when members of house Feder killed six Praetorians who attempted to intervene in their dispute with the Makath family, did the Emperor intervene to stop the feuding. He dictated that any attack on an imperial servant was an attack on himself, therefore treason and punishable by death, as was any action that impeded on the smooth running of the Empire. He did not command the houses to abandon vendetta, rather to find a way of minimizing collateral damage. The result, after a Grand Conclave, were the formal rules of vendetta and dueling now known as

Duara'coa, overseen by the Board of Duelists.

The first master of the Board of Duelists was Colnar, one of the Emperor's illegitimate children. Having been raised at court, he was fully versed in the sophisticated protocols of noble life but as a child had also been free to roam the city, exposing him to the underbelly of society. With little else to occupy his time, he'd spent considerable time with the Praetorians and other troops, becoming familiar with a wide variety of armed and unarmed combat techniques, though he favored the traditional blade techniques, his elaborately hilted sword becoming almost as famous as he was. Colnar was thus an ideal candidate to mediate the numerous social disputes of the Empire, as comfortable in a witty palace conversation as in an earthy debate with a laborer. He understood how the various strata of society worked and interacted, and was thus able to shape the rules of the Duara'coa to minimize strife and to ritualize the resolution of disputes. Much of the Duara'coa governed social interactions — the formal greetings and acknowledgement of status; the rights and responsibilities of individuals to their superiors, peers, and vassals; and the peace-bonding of weapons on social occasions — though it is for the procedures for declaring intent and resolving disputes by combat that are best known today.

Unlike before the board, duels could



not simply be fought. The offended party had to formally declare intent to resolve a dispute by combat, naming the time and place for the duel, which must be at least a day after the declaration, allowing the other party — or interested outsiders — to reach a peaceable solution. Both participants had to agree on the weapons to be used (fists, if no agreement could be reached) and the nature of the fight — first blood, knockout, or to the death (first blood by default). Each duelist was allowed a second, to tend their weapons and provide medical assistance, but any outside assistance in the combat would forfeit the battle in favor of the other side. Magic remained a gray area, with direct magic use prohibited (save in a duel between magi), though charms and enchanted items used by the participants were permitted.

Colnar himself wielded an enchanted longsword, which while intrinsically less powerful than the blades carried by some of his peers, enhanced his abilities and gave him preternatural speed and agility. Colnar was a renowned master of defensive combat, and the sword built on these strengths to render him almost untouchable, should he so desire. In his forty-three years as head of the board, he fought more than a hundred combats yet only sustained three wounds and never lost a formal duel. Weapons like Colnar's became popular across the empire, particularly among duelists, particularly the elaborate crosspiece and hand-guard, as well as the detailed engraving on the top quarter of the blade. The sword was also renowned for its intelligence, serving as both advisor and confidant to the master. After its creation, the sword was cold and emotionless but over the years it took on some of Colnar's mannerisms. When he returned, Master Colnar handed the blade on to his successor as a symbol of authority, charging the blade to advise those who followed.

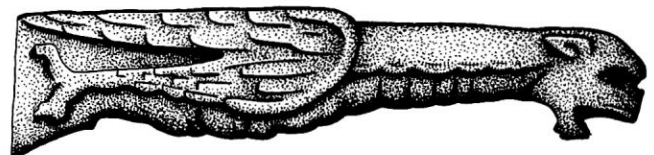
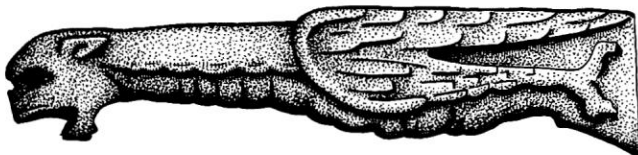
Over the centuries, the sword counseled the Masters of the Duara'coa, its ageless experience and advice a boon to many particularly in their early years, simultaneously adopting the traits of those wielders it respected. No matter how much it learned, however, the sword's voice and core personality remained that of Master Colnar, and the sentient weapon resisted any attempt to call it anything other than "Master Colnar's Sword." Indeed, Master Hermarous Pizarro, the infamous Dueling Master of the late Imperial era, found himself deprived of the sword's knowledge, insight and abilities for three years after having his own name engraved on the blade. The weapon only relented and returned its favor to the Master in the dual against the outlander Porcal, knowing that to do otherwise risked dishonor for the Duara'coa.

How the sword survived the fall of the Empire is unclear, though it is known that the last Duara'coa master, Ellis Ko'Mara, fought with Darak Mhoran in his campaign against Satrap-Magus Moralis. There is no record of

Ko'Mara's presence at the cataclysmic final battle nor in the dark years that followed, though the sword reappeared some twenty years later, suggesting the Dueling Master was not present, either brought low in earlier battles or off fighting other foes. Tales of the sword next place it in the hands of Piers Lamant, the charismatic paladin who strove to bring order to the chaos of the lands devastated by war. His one-man fight against injustice likely appealed to the sword's sense of purpose, though the tales speak of heated arguments between wielder and blade, the sword's belief in balance occasionally at odds with the warrior's pursuit of good. Nonetheless, Lamant proved effective in his crusade for many years, bringing hope to many in the devastated lands. Unfortunately, even heroes die eventually, Lamant's time coming when he was ambushed by a band of orcs near the city of Hope's Edge. Making a last stand on a bluff high above the Thon Gorge, Lamant brought down a score of assailants before being mortally wounded by the Orc champion. His last thought was of the sword — he did not want such a fine weapon falling into the hands of filthy orcs — and he threw both himself and the blade from the high cliffs.

The blade languished in the Thon River for decades, protected from corrosion by the enchantments laid upon it. Eventually it was snagged in a fisherman's nets and returned to dry land, sold for a small fortune — to the fisherman at least — to a weapon smith in Clef who recognized the fine craftsmanship of the blade. The years of isolation had taken their toll on the sword's intellect, becoming taciturn and withdrawn, communicating with others only grudgingly. Slowly but surely the smith, named Roland Born, drew out the sword's personality, earning the respect of the weapon for his fair-mindedness and superlative knowledge of arms and armor. The sword shared its knowledge of the ancient empire and the traditions and practices of Duara'coa, attracting the attention of many warriors who traded with the smith. These individuals founded the Brotherhood of Duelists, an informal association of warriors that has sought to restore the traditions of the Duara'coa, emphasizing personal honor and that of their fellowship. The Brotherhood lacks the unity of the Knights of Rhun, nor is it as large as other associations, but its claims of traditions dating back millennia have attracted considerable attention, particularly from scholars.

The sword itself remains where it has been for the last dozen years, with Roland Born. If such a thing can be believed, a bond of trust and friendship has grown up between the sword and the smith. Roland feels himself unworthy of the sword — his martial skills are competent rather than impressive — and he is constantly seeking a worthy bearer for the weapon.



The Warsword of Darak

Darak Mhoran was born the fourth son of the Duke of Alba, never likely to inherit, nor to have any impact on the world save as a subordinate to his brothers. As befitting his status, he received a comprehensive education in the arts and manners, as well as in swordsmanship. He proved an adept pupil of the latter and his tutors prevailed upon the duke to enroll Darak in the military academy at Chateauvert, where he learned the arts of war. He excelled, a mix of charisma and intelligence making him a natural leader and a superlative commander, while his strength and agility allowed Darak to outfight all comers. By the age of nineteen, he was captain of an Imperial company, earning numerous distinctions for his bravery in often trying circumstances. Darak's Demons, as the company came to be known, established itself as a troubleshooter unit, assigned to wherever the fighting was heaviest and most dangerous. Their presence was a sign of the importance of the conflict, and the likely victory of the Imperial forces.

Within a few years, Darak commanded a full regiment, complete with mage and cleric support, and his reputation continued to grow. He crushed the Turlough rebellion, despite being outnumbered 3-to-1, and held back the Ostermann Horde for fifteen days before being relieved. He was loved by his men and respected by his peers, but the Imperial family, who kept him occupied on the fringes of the Empire, saw his success as a threat. This petty jealousy would be the empire's undoing when Satrap-Magus Moralis launched his coup.

The units assigned to the capital were weak and ill disciplined, no match for Moralis' seasoned mercenaries. By the time news of the coup reached Darak in the borderlands, the Imperial family was dead and their supporters scattered. Using his stranglehold on the treasury and the military, as well as his dominance in the Conclave of Magi, Moralis persuaded the Imperial Electors to name him Emperor and set about imposing his will. The Magus-Emperor called upon many outlying satraps and military governors to bow to his will and many did. Darak refused and beat off a half-hearted effort to dislodge his forces. What followed was a long a bloody war that devastated the Empire while slowly but surely denuding Moralis' power. Almost 10 years after the start of the civil war, Darak and his armies stood before the Imperial City, preparing for the final and most significant battle of the war. Duke Mhoran as he was by then—his father and brothers had perished in the war, killed by Moralis' allies—was exhausted and prematurely aged by the numerous injuries he had sustained in the campaign. Nonetheless, he was determined to bring end the conflict.

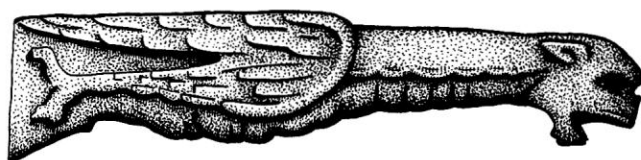
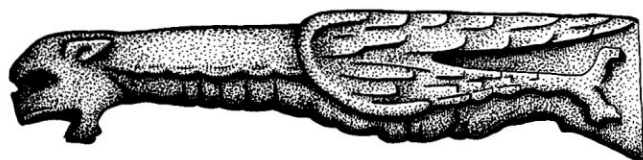
The final battle unleashed forces of a hitherto unbelievable magnitude. Foot soldiers clashed on the ground while wyverns and battle-dragons wove intricate patterns in the air. Mages cast spells and counter-spells, while clerics blessed their forces and cast healing spells. Darak manipulated every aspect of the battle, and when one flank was in danger of collapsing, personally lead a counterassault, his warsword held high. Eventually, Darak's forces prevailed and forced the usurper and his allies to seek shelter in the fortified palace. Hoping to avoid the bloodshed that he knew would ensue, the warlord called a parley with Magus Moralis. The meeting was bitter and tempestuous, neither side willing to give ground. Eventually Moralis stormed out, cursing Warlord Darak as he did so. "No matter how much time passes, or what happens to the empire, you will never know peace or rest" were the magus' words, though no one took them seriously at the time.

Darak's forces took the palace by storm the next day but at their hour of victory, Moralis broke his staff and called down devastation from the skies. A rain of fire destroyed the imperial city, leaving a smoking ruin where once stood the finest buildings in the world. Both armies perished, leaders and troopers alike reduced to ash. The empire was no more and collapsed into a succession of petty kingdoms.

Years after the battle—some say a decade, others half a century—scavengers in the city came across a sword. This surprised them as the firestorm had reduced every other item to scrap, with fragments usually no larger than a coin. Yet, here was a sword of exquisite quality, seemingly in pristine condition, a mystery for sure, though the scavengers were only concerned with how much money the sword would be worth to the merchants who traded on the fringes of the devastation.

The sword passed through several owners, usually languishing as a decorative piece above a merchant's fireplace, before being bought by the Duke of Cher. The Duke had seen the weapon while dining with a rich merchant in his city, and as an experienced military commander and collector of fine weapons, he had to own the sword that resembled that wielded by the legendary Warlord Darak. The Duke knew he had purchased a unique weapon, but even he was surprised when he lifted the sword from the case in which the merchant had transported it. "Ah, a warrior. About time," the sword declaimed.

Several servants fainted dead away, and the duke was astounded by the development. The sword was clearly imbued with sentience and able to communicate with other beings, something the legends hadn't mentioned about Darak's sword. Cher shooed the servants from the room and settled into conversation with the intelligent



weapon. Long into the night, they talked and he was astounded to learn that his wasn't the sword of Darak. It was Darak.

Moralis' spell, and the nature of the warlords demise, had trapped his soul in the sword, cursing him to an eternity of wakefulness and war, just as the Satrap-Magus intended. The weapon retained a number of the warlord's attributes, notably his commanding presence and his combat abilities. Though old, the duke soon learned that when wielding the sword his martial skills were formidable, enchantments within the sword making him faster, stronger and more dexterous.

Unfortunately, Darak had clear ideas of what he wanted the wielder to do and was convinced of his own superiority. The warlord's forcible personality would challenge any actions he disliked, forcing the wielder to fight for control of the weapon and dominating any weak-willed bearers. Darak regretted the loss of his body and, failing the creation of a new one, was quite happy to 'hijack' that of his bearer, often triggering an insane fury in the heat of battle.

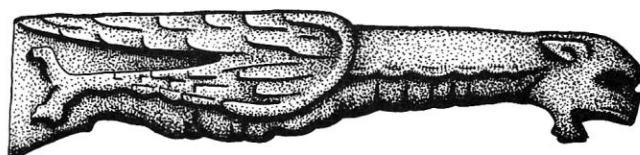
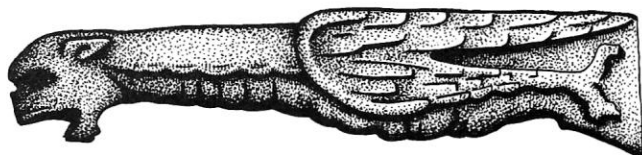
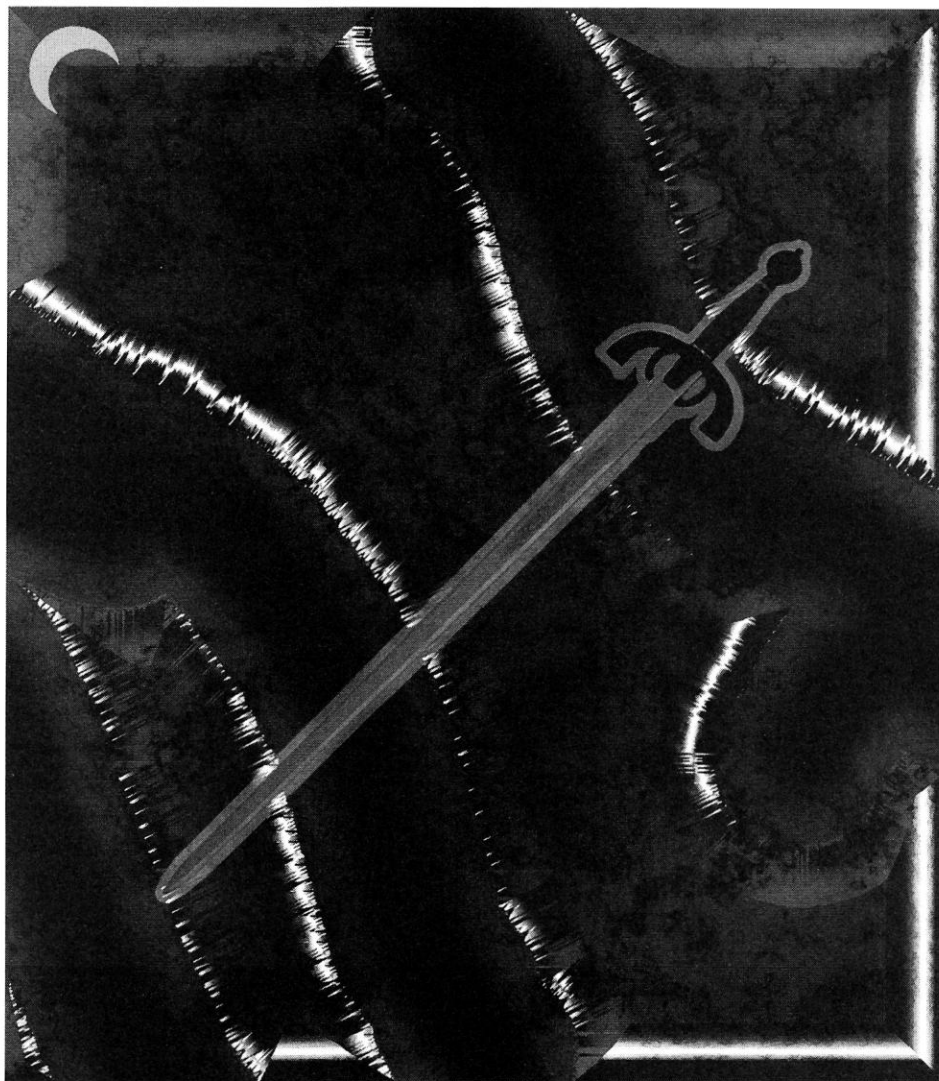
The sword remained in Duke Cher's family for several generations before finally being "lost" on the battlefield (Darak disliked his wielder, the sedentary Normas, and fell from his hand, causing the duke's death and the failure of his cause) and passed into the hands of the mercenary leader Michaelades. In the mercenary captain, Darak found a kindred spirit and their partnership cut a bloody swath across the land, eventually culminating in the for-

mation of the Kingdom of Asturonne in which the mercenaries supplanted the ruling classes. Darak remained with Michaelades' heirs as they fought to maintain the kingdom, a succession of strong and competent leaders satisfying the sword's desire for battle and victory.

Eventually, however, he became too successful and peace reigned in the kingdom. Darak tolerated this for a while, then treacherously slipped from the King's scabbard one day while he was out hunting.

He was found by a band of orcs, and while initially despising his new bearers, has become intrigued by the challenge of building an army from the undisciplined rabble of the orc tribes. He has dominated the orc chieftain, Grushak, and has used him to instill an unprecedented level of discipline and martial prowess on the tribe's warriors, allowing them to defeat and absorb many of their neighbors. Grushak's "empire" has

grown to an size unheard of in orcdom and even the civilized lands have heard rumors of an orc warlord working to unify the tribes, though they expect the situation to degenerate into chaos, or at worst a series of disorganized tribal incursions such as happened a century ago. As a result, they have made few preparations save to bolster the number of bounds-riders on the fringe of their domains. If Darak succeeds, the lords will be in for a grave surprise...



The Kiss of the Karsha

Some nations are built by commerce. Some are built upon a commonality of race or faith. Some others are built upon bloody conquest. Such was the case of the ancient southern empire of Majandha-Khimir.

In Majandha-Khimir, the waging of war was held to be an art form, and the most celebrated of citizens were those generals who demonstrated genius upon the battlefield. Warfare was also a religion to the Majandha-Khimiri. Their very name could be translated to mean, "the savage people, children of Khimi, goddess of war." (The Majandha-Khimiri held that the war god was not male but female, representing the reverse side of the coin of birth and life. And after all, was this not demonstrated in nature? The most savage and dangerous of beasts were mother bears, mother lions, and mother wolves, when their offspring was threatened.) Worshiping their deadly goddess and forever honing their skills at war, the Majandha-Khimiri conquered nearly all of the southern continent, enslaving nations old and new that shared that land-mass with them, until, in the end, their empire itself was conquered from within by the peaceful teachings of the saffron-robed Lahtani monks, and the temples to Khimi at last fell into silence and disrepair.

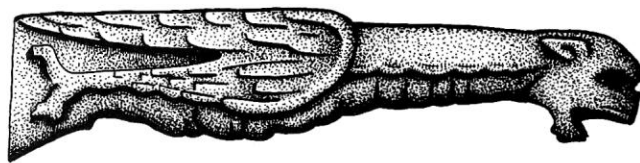
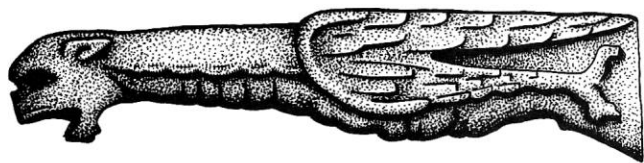
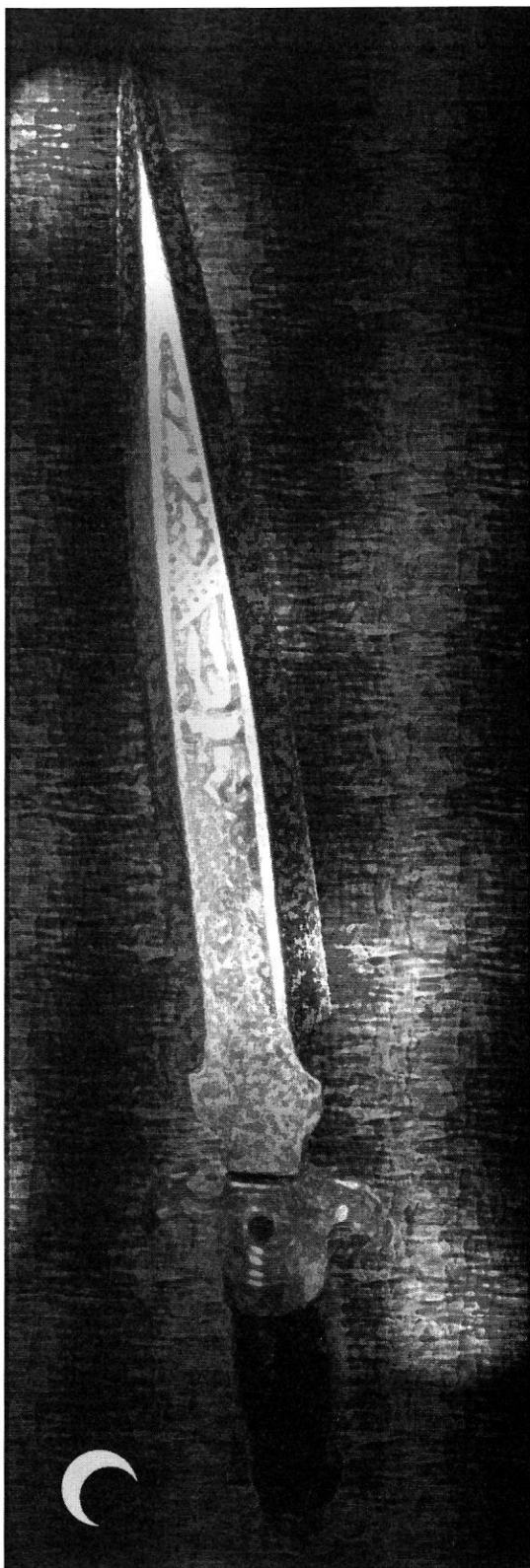
In its heyday, however, worship of Khimi fielded some of the most effective warriors the world has ever known. In particular, a sect of priestesses arose who were trained as deadly battlefield assassins, sent to seek out enemy commanders and slay them in the very heart of their own armies. Besides mastering arts of stealth,

speed, and gymnastics that made them seem supernatural beings in their own right, and often overawed or unmanned any sentries they might encounter on their missions, these priestesses—known as the Karsha among

worshippers of Khimi—were also trained in the use of a special sort of short blade designed to thwart every type of armor.

Appearing absurdly thin and flexible, the Kiss of the Karsha, as this sort of blade was called, was created to perform mainly as a deadly slashing weapon, with a razor-sharp edge both front and back. Light and sharp, the blade could easily be moved with blurring speed. But in the hands of a Karsha, it could also be used in a lightning fast, double-handed thrust that could penetrate even the best made of armor, slipping through a joint, a weak weld, or even a seemingly invisible flaw in the metal itself, to seek out the vital organs of the man within. The Karsha trained incessantly to recognize and take advantage of such weak points during the heat of combat, and many was the enemy commander who fell victim to their training.

Sadly, the secrets of metalworking that made the manufacture of such blades possible have been lost with the decline of Khimi's temples centuries ago. Ask most current weapon smiths about the Kiss of the Karsha, and they will laugh off the tales as mere myths. But in the southern realms, rumors have it that some few of the original blades still exist, perhaps in the private collections of connoisseurs of finely made weapons. Or it may be that somewhere, secret temples to Khimi still exist, where a few lost members of the Karsha continue to pass along their secrets, and their blades, to their daughters, in the hopes that someday Khimi may return to restore them to their proper glory.



Sword of the Flies

Thayer and Ruudi emerged from the dim cave to a sunny spring morning.

"That was too cool!" Ruudi exclaimed, holding his hand up to block the bright sun from his squinting eyes. A rogue of common stripe, he carried a sack full of plundered coins under one arm.

"Yeah, I told you adventuring would be great!" Thayer agreed, flopping down beneath a tree to let the warm sunshine wash over his body. The young half-elf knew something of the blade and of magic, enough to cast his one spell and then defend himself with steel. He, too, had a small bag of treasure that he let spill out on the ground.

"Goblins are no match for us, eh!" Ruudi boasted, stretching and sitting beside his friend, swatting at a horsefly buzzing around his head. "You put most of them to sleep, then we cut the rest to pieces!"

"Yeah, the little green bastards are pretty crappy fighters," Thayer chided. "We could have probably killed a half dozen more if they hadn't all run off. Still, we got their gold and that sword." Ruudi pulled the simple weapon from his belt and swung it in the air a couple of times.

"It's not a bad sword," he said, stopping to smack a fly biting at his neck. "Are you sure it's not magical somehow?"

"No way. My uncle Carl says goblins never have magical treasure. Besides, it isn't glowing. All magical stuff glows."

"I guess you're right. So, what now?"

"Well," Thayer got to his feet and shooed a couple of flies from his face. "I suppose we should go into town and pay some cleric to heal you up." Ruudi twisted to get a better view of the cut along his flank, chasing away a handful of flies lingering on the wound. "Anyway, that's what Uncle Carl said he and his buddies always did. 'When you get out of the dungeon head for a temple to get healed up' he always said."

"I thought that last goblin was dead. Dirty bugger!"

"Let's get going, then. We can probably get to a temple before nightfall."

By then the flies were getting pretty thick and they were both glad to get moving. But the flies followed, buzzing and biting, annoying both young adventurers as they made their way along the forest trail.

"Is there a stream running along near here?" Thayer asked, swatting at a cluster of flies intent on his nose.

"I don't think so," Ruudi answered, flailing his arms to ward off the thickening insects. "Maybe there's a pig farmer nearby or something."

"I think we'd smell that by now," Thayer said, spitting out a fly that wound up in his mouth. "Damn, these flies are really starting to hack me off!"

"Me, too. Let's jog a bit and maybe we'll get rid of them."

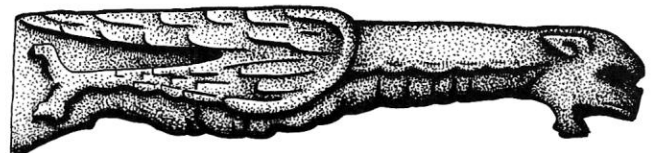
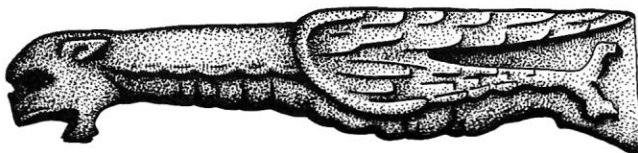
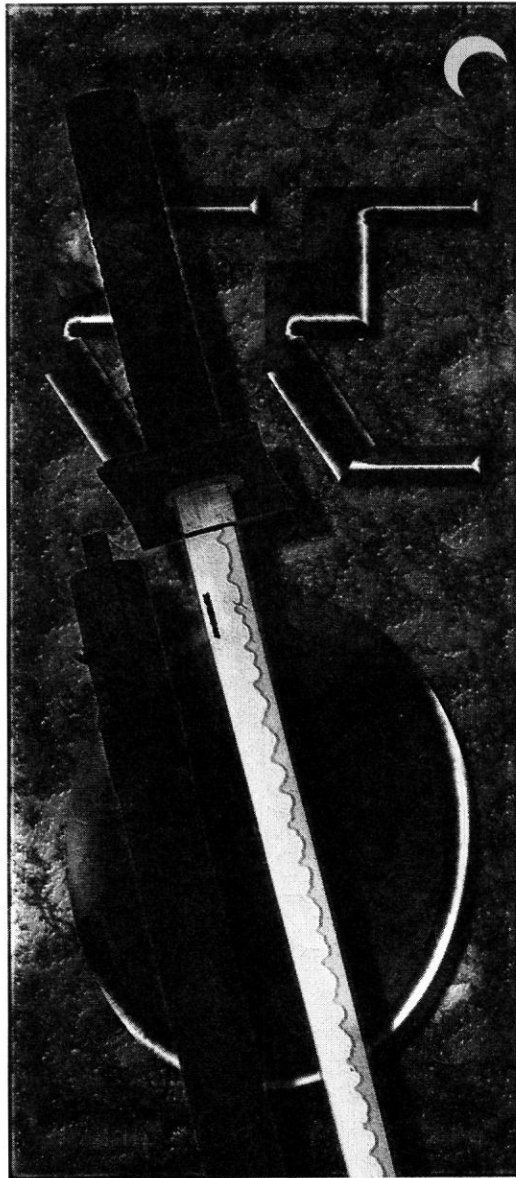
"What about your leg?"

"It should hold up for awhile."

And off they sped, thumping along the trail. But instead of leaving the flies behind they seemed to multiply into thick clouds all around them. Thayer reached back to smash three and four at a time on the back of his neck, and drew his hand back smeared with his own blood. Ruudi's exposed leg wound was black with flies buzzing and biting until he screamed out in pain.

"Ruudi!" Thayer screamed when his comrade collapsed into the bushes at the side of the trail, barely visible within a cloud of black flies. His next breath choked him as a wad of flies sped down his throat and into his lungs. Thayer collapsed not far from his comrade, gasping for breath and finally dying beneath a thick blanket of frenzied flies.

With the pair barely dead, a single squinting goblin darted out from behind a bush and descended upon Ruudi's fly-covered corpse. Gnashing teeth and snarling, it jerked the plundered sword free from his belt. Grabbing a handful of flies and stuffing them into his mouth, the beast chomped greedily and slinked back toward its cave, dragging the point of the blade along the dusty trail.



Whistler

Centuries ago, when the elven kingdom of Charluser still stood in the shadow of the tall trees, and betrayal had not yet quickened the hearts of elves and men with fear and hatred, there lived a human ranger known as Aidan Hosler, whose sworn duty it was to keep the paths between Charluser and the human kingdom of Rushcurr open and safe. This he did with no allegiance to either country — rather, Aidan guarded those paths as his master once had, driven by a vow as old as the paths themselves.

The very first Pathwarden had sworn to protect the trails in an attempt to encourage and preserve elven and human communication and friendship. When it came time for him to teach another the ways of nature, he taught also that each race had much to teach the other. His student took up his master's vow, and with it his mission, and so it was until Aidan.

Aidan did his duty well and long, but as he grew older, there were whispers among the elves that humanity was as a cancer on the world, only able to destroy, and no elf stepped forward to learn from Aidan. Among the humans, rumors were spread of the great magical knowledge the elves hid for themselves, and no human stepped forward to learn from Aidan. Bitterness and anger grew, and Aidan could only watch—for he was a mere woodsman, and a diplomat was needed.

At last Aidan could stand it no longer, and he asked the king of Charluser and the king of Rushcurr, in honor of the service he and his forebears had provided, to meet and speak on those very paths he protected. Each king, though wary, acknowledged the neutrality of the Pathwarden and greatly desired to end the bickering and recriminations, and they seized on Aidan's offer as a way to safely do so.

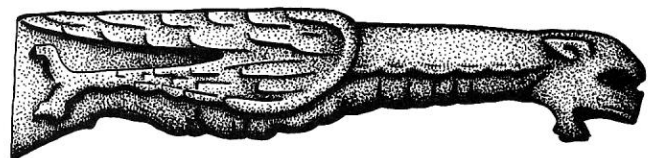
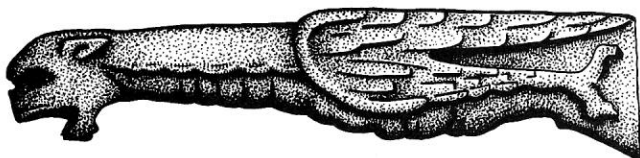
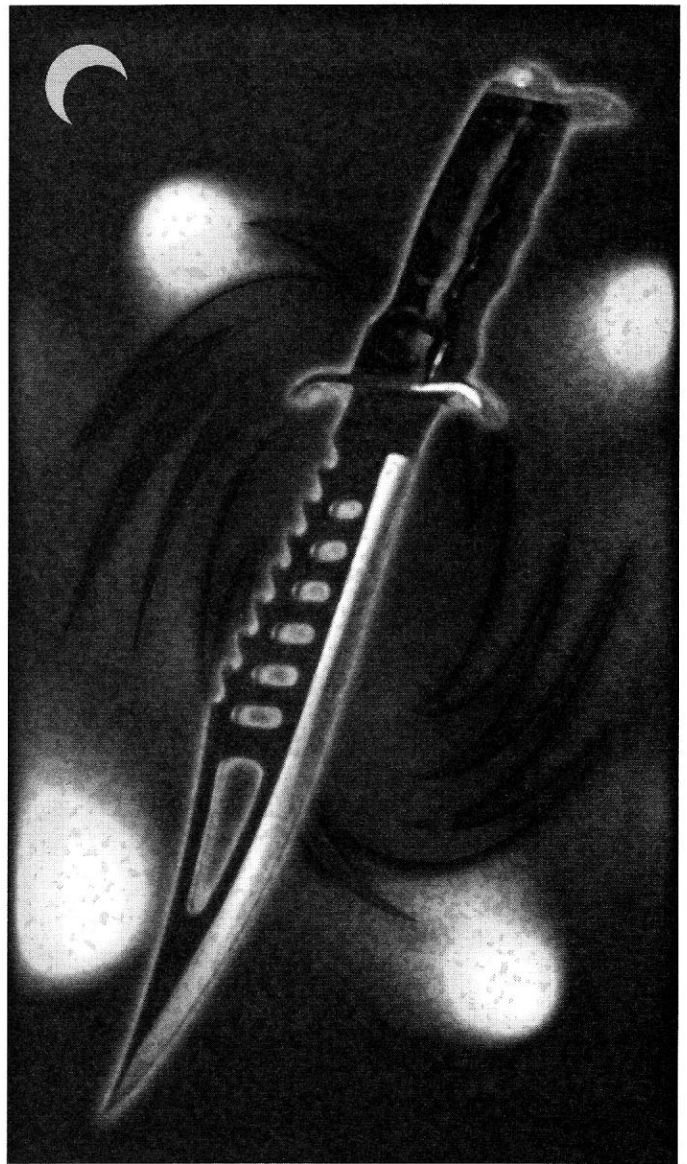
And so they met, elven king and human king, under the branches of the tall trees between their kingdoms, protected by a headstrong Pathwarden and those members of other races he knew and trusted. This historic meeting cleared the diplomatic air between the kings, and they were so pleased that they had a glade there designated neutral territory, guarded by non-elves and non-humans only under the leadership of the Pathwarden.

Aidan himself they rewarded with examples of their finest craftsmanship: an elven-made short sword named Whilistral but called Whistler by Aidan, and a human-made dagger known as Hawkeye. Each was a mighty weapon in its own right, but Aidan wielded one in each hand, making him a most formidable opponent indeed.

Simple but majestic, Whistler was made with several large holes in the blade, which both reduced its weight and produced a whistling noise when it was used, from

which it got its name. It was small, even for a short sword, but quite strongly enchanted, protecting its wielder from all sound-based attacks, and also able to generate a high-pitched noise capable of shattering glass or alter other sounds. Most dreadful, however, was when its cheerful whistling became a mournful dirge, which frightened all who heard it.

When Aidan died, his two gifts were buried with him in a grave in the neutral grove. This grave was despoiled when human armies overran and burned Charluser. Hawkeye has been found, but Whistler's location is unknown. Legends speak of a ghostly form haunting the area the Pathwardens once guarded, however, with a weapon that resembles Whistler in its hand. This has led some to guess that Whistler is still in the grave, the property of Aidan's ghost.



Delvin's Lament

A paladin of some notoriety, Delvin Horrocks pledged his life in service to Teironnel following the death of his wife and his two young daughters in a senseless orc raid, one that killed every man, woman and child in Delvin's village. Only he and a handful of others survived, but only because they were still on the lake, bringing in the day's catch. Instead, they watched helplessly as flame consumed the village, leaving nothing but ash in the wake of the orc attack.

Though Teironnel is a relatively minor god, a large contingent of her followers resided nearby in the countryside. They immediately rushed to lend what assistance they could to the survivors, but by the time they arrived, the village was no more. When they found Delvin and the

other fishermen, they offered them the only thing they could: a new home.

The others soon moved on, but Delvin remained with the followers of Teironnel. He quickly became the god's most devout follower. One night, not long after the razing of his village, the god visited the man in his dreams and called him – Delvin would be Teironnel's mortal hand, smiting those who would prey upon the innocent and defenseless.

He would need a weapon and armor to carry out his god's will, equipment she handily supplied. Delvin led the followers of Teironnel back to his home village and they gathered every scrap of metal they could from the ruins and returned to their commune. From that scrap, under the guidance of his god, Delvin fashioned a long sword and a suit of armor. As Delvin forged his weapon and armor, Teironnel herself appeared and imbued the items with a bit of her own essence. So long as he remained faithful to her cause, they would protect him for the rest of his life.

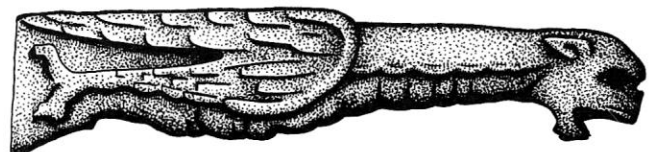
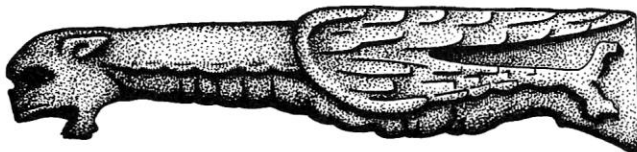
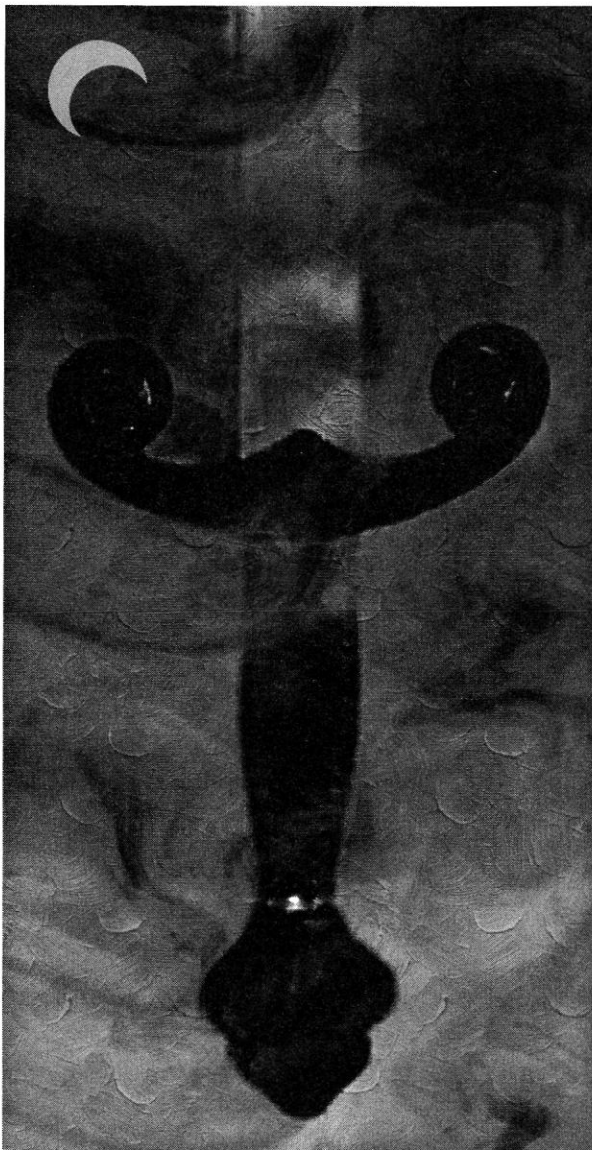
Delvin immediately began his work. He roamed the countryside, defending travelers and hunters from the predations of all types of evil. But no matter how hard he tried, he never found the orc tribe that had so utterly destroyed his family.

Then, one day several years later, the roving tribe returned. As soon as Delvin learned of it, he brought together a war band to go and punish the raiders. Delvin's band came upon the orc raiding party before they had the chance to raze another town. Though Delvin lost many good men, not a single orc escaped the ambush alive.

But Delvin was not satisfied that they'd seen the last of the orcs. He tracked the rest of the tribe to their makeshift village in the nearby foothills. They found only women and children intent more on protecting themselves than attacking Delvin and his men. Delvin was about to let the rest of the tribe go when he saw something he recognized: a locket he had given his wife hanging around the neck of an orc child. In a flash, all of the pain and hatred of the past came back and he struck the child down and her brother, and then her mother. Soon, the rest of Delvin's band joined in. Before long they had slaughtered the rest of the orc tribe.

For the first time in his life, Delvin felt vindicated. But that night Teironnel visited him. He had violated her trust, her will. It was he who had become the one who preyed on the innocent. For his sins, she condemned him to relive his own pain, as well as that of the innocents he had murdered every day for the rest of his life.

He died a broken man not long after. His sword now rests with him inside the commune's catacombs, seemingly waiting for someone worthy to take possession of it.



Sword of the Fighter

Fully 144 of these enchanted blades were ordered for the city watch of Dragonkind. The idea behind the swords was a sound one, but for one year, the concept did terrible things to the guard. Everyone had differing opinions on what the weapon should be and the powers that should be given to it. There was a substantial expense to be levied for the creation of these blades, so it became an important issue, needing to be handled right.

Committees of guardsmen, blacksmiths, and war wizards were put together to decide on what the weapons would be. Great debates were held for hours on the topic, and there were thousands of spectators wanting to put their two copper pieces into the details of what the blade should be. After three months of debate, it was decided that the weapon would be a war axe with the brilliant energy power applied to the blade. A model of the weapon was made, and all concerned were impressed with its ability to ignore nonliving matter.

There were few objections to the making of these blades, and the order was going to be signed into fact at a small celebration party in the town square. When Androlanson, the lich, appeared in the middle of the gathering, it put a damper on the party. It seemed brilliant energy blades didn't affect the undead at all. Eventually the lich was driven off, but only with much loss to people and property. The blade committee was fired, and Alex Guardianson was told to take charge.

Alex was the best swordsman in a city filled with bladesmen. He'd been the head of the city watch for 11 years, and his father, grandfather, and great grandfather had also held that title in their

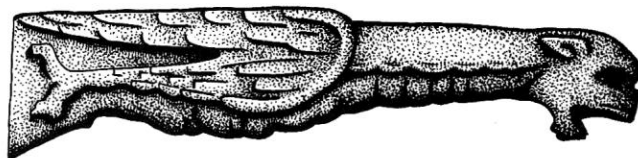
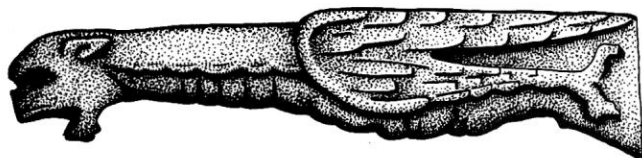
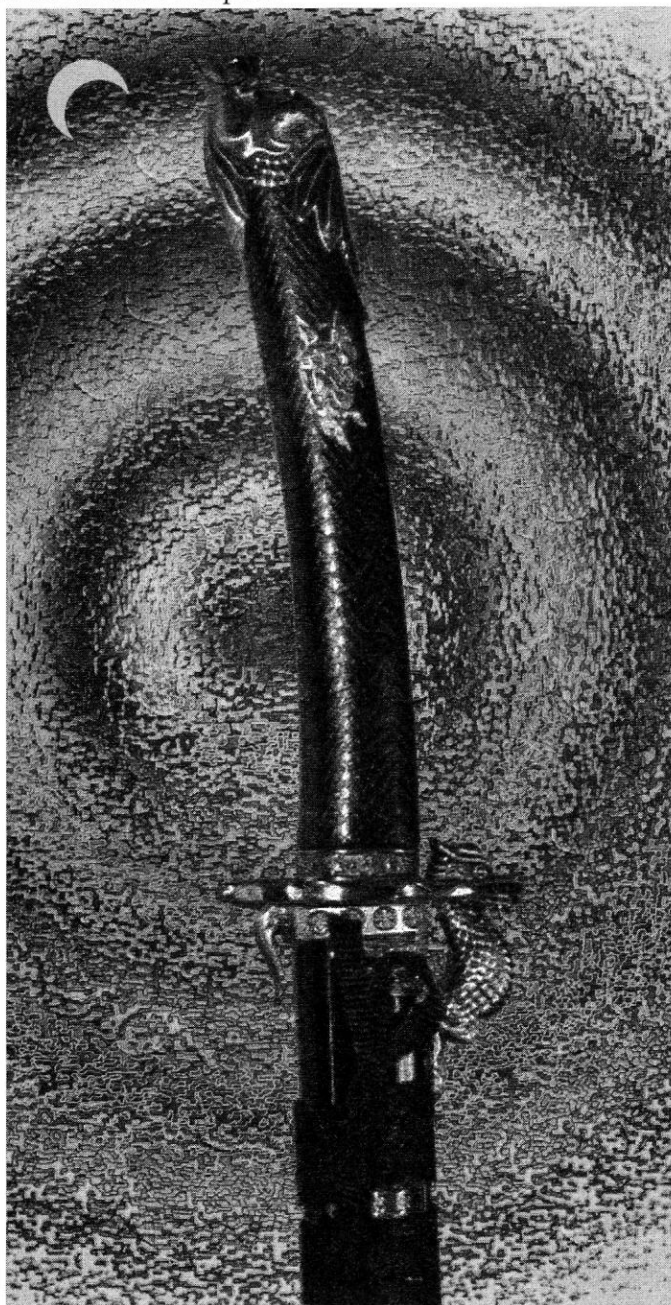
time. He strongly suspected he knew exactly what qualities he wanted in the sword, but he used some of the city's resources to prove himself correct.

He gathered a thousand different magical swords from the far reaches of the kingdom and put them in the hands of men and women who had never used a sword before. He then had those people hack at trained warriors in full plate armor with large shields at their side. He and his aids noted which weapons did well and how many times the armor of the fighters was struck. He politely thanked the 1,000 untrained people who helped him, replaced the unlucky troopers who didn't guard themselves sufficiently, and then went on to his next test. He placed those

same blades in the hands of skillful fighters and had them hack away at the men in armor. He and his aids noted the findings of that day's work. He wrote letters of condolences to the wives and families of the armored troopers who were killed; then he went on to the last phase of his testing.

He'd narrowed the possibilities down to four of the magical blades. He had the other 996 sold in the city, making a tidy profit on the sales, which made the city's accountants happy for a change. For the next eight days, he tested the four blades himself against a number of different weapons and armor styles. The fourth day he had his shoulder dislocated from a skillful mace blow. He took a healing potion to stop the pain and fought with his other hand, as he was as skilled with his right as with his left.

His findings exactly matched what he had first thought. He needed magic in his swords that would allow any user to strike faster and be defended in the process. The order was put out, and in six months the fighters of the city guard of Dragonkind became even more deadly.



Sword of the Barbarian

The nature god Obad-Hai was having a really bad century. He'd lost a great deal of enchanted land to human settlements. Prime forest was being changed by elves everywhere he looked. Elves who, by the way, didn't have the sense to worship him. He was deadly tired of throwing 20-day rains and snowstorms at the civilizations hurting him. Besides, they just rebuilt stronger and better after each cataclysm. No, he had to do something vastly different. The deity began searching the wilds for likely candidates to touch with his essence, and right away he found just what he was looking for. Obad-Hai's magic began pouring from the heavens, and the world changed.

The mountain tiger was openly stalking young Tarton in the ruins of the ancients. Tarton dwelt in a village several miles away. He was searching for a missing goat when the big cat roared its challenge and missed in its first pounce. Silently screaming for a little help from Obad-Hai, the big lad began running for his life. Tarton was quick, but he knew he wasn't as fast as the big cat. The sling in his hand wasn't going to be much good against this huge beast about to eat him. As he moved through the ruined buildings, he feared he'd never get away. Suddenly, he saw a glint of metal in the tall grass, and he reached for it and pulled up a sword. It was not at all rusted. New strength and hope flowed in Tarton's veins. Fear was suddenly replaced by rage! How dare this beast stalk him! Tarton turned and wisely looked for a place to stand and fight the beast. With newfound strength, he fearlessly walked to a position beneath a low overhang in the ruins. The cat would have to come at him from the front, and there would be a sword facing it from that direction.

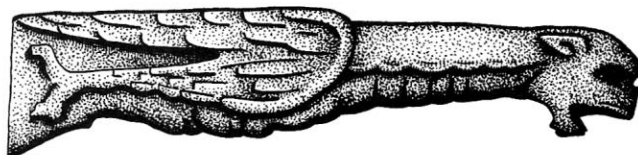
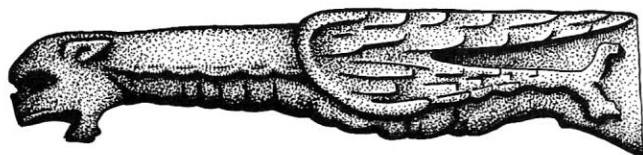
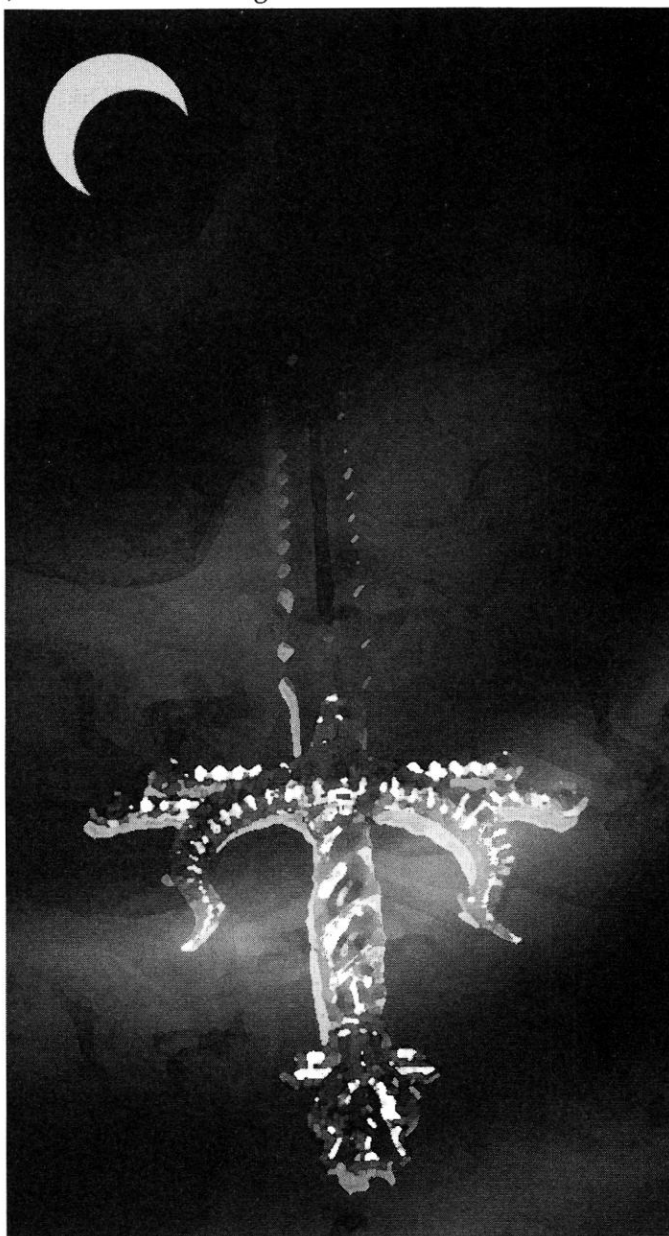
The tiger sprang into

Tarton's field of vision. Completely unafraid now, Tarton shouted a battle cry at the beast and egged it on. The mountain tiger roared back a challenge, but it didn't quite know what to do about this suddenly bold prey. Not a timid creature, the cat swung a massive paw at the metal tooth in front of it. Tarton's newfound speed allowed him to snap a strike at the paw, cutting it to the bone. The beast roared this time in pain. The huge feline couldn't launch itself at its prey because of the overhang. It tried reaching in with both claws.

With a speed Tarton never knew he had, he dodged the claws of the great cat and placed his blade down the throat of the monster, killing it instantly. As the beast fell, Tarton's rage didn't abate, and he sliced hundreds of times into the body of the monster. As a final insult, he

chopped off the head of the beast and dragged it down to his village. Tarton became a barbarian hero that day, and his legend and praise of Obid-Hai grew to amazing heights.

The god sat back, pleased with his first effort. There would be other likely lads his swords would turn into barbarians who would help to keep back the smothering effects of civilization. These young lads would take his swords and lead armies against the civilized places. In the days to follow, over 20 large lads who called out for aid from Obid-Hai, received new swords from the magical essence of the god. All of them turned into barbarians, finding unsuspected reserves of strength and wisdom they didn't know they had. With each of these, the cause of the god was strengthened. In the years to come, some of these lads died, but others who picked up their fallen swords also became barbarians. In a decade, some of those cities causing the god problems were destroyed by mighty barbarian generals with magical swords, and Obid-Hai smiled at a job well done.



Paladin's Questing Sword

Whitemoore Trueheart moved through the forest with a smile on his lips and a song in his heart. He was leading a small band of clerics of Divenica into the middle of the Emerald forest. These were clerics of his goddess, and he liked helping them out. They were searching for a long-lost shrine in the forest, and the paladin had always liked exploring this particular forest, so the short quest was made even better by the holy act.

At the moment, he was especially pleased with himself, as he was able to lead the group around the lairs of the emerald death spiders. He'd lost a good mount last year

to those creatures and didn't want to face them again if he didn't have to. He was also able to show the clerics the now ruined wizard tower of the evil Marduke.

Whitemoore had taken care of that little problem himself two years ago. He'd also talked some hill giants into taking the tower down stone by stone, and he could still feel the evil of the place even after the evil wizard was dead.

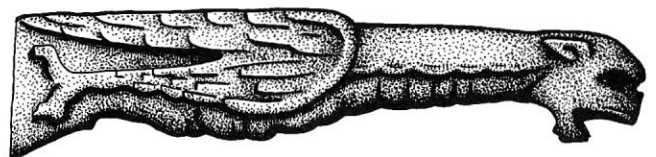
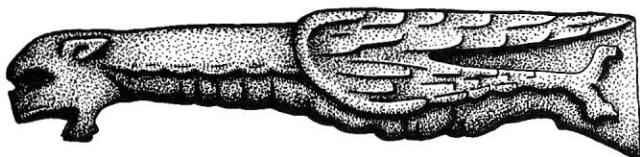
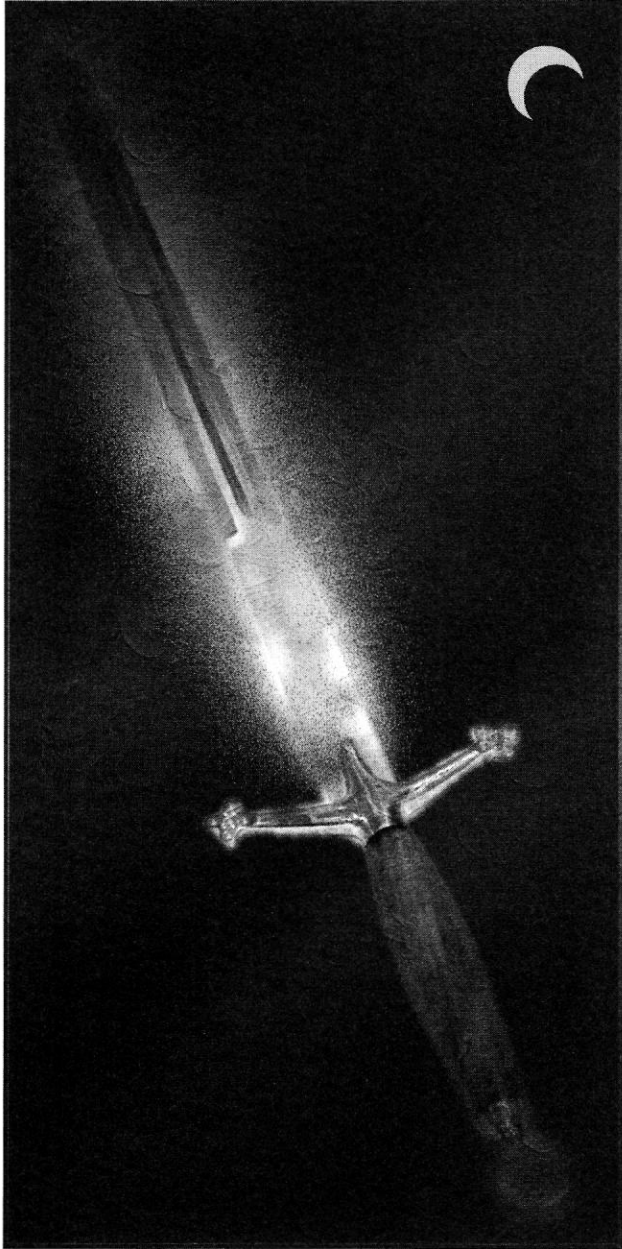
Then his questing sword vibrated in its sheath, and the paladin knew trouble was ahead. His goddess had given the magical questing blade to him four years ago. It had never failed to warn him of danger. He ordered the clerics in his charge to remain where they were. He asked for their blessings and prayers in this time of need. When warnings from his sword came, he always did the same thing, he drew his weapon and charged.

Bursting through the light brush of the forest, Whitemoore came into a wide meadow, and the horror of the situation instantly hit all his senses. He'd found the hidden shrine of Divenica, but so had an evil cleric and his band of zombies. Dark magics were flowing from the hands of the cleric and covering the white marble of the shrine. The paladin rode into the mass of evil, shouting a battle cry to his goddess.

The evil cleric, Devon Heartsblood, was just doing his job. He was exploring the Emerald Forest for his unholy order. In the process, he was gathering up what evil he could. Just two days ago, he talked some pleasant spiders of unusual size out of a clutch of their eggs. He'd promised them that their young would be treated to the best in human flesh. Today he'd come upon a very nasty shrine of goodness in the middle of a glen. He really had no choice. If he didn't despoil the shrine, he really wouldn't be doing his job properly. He shuddered to think what would happen to him if he didn't do his job properly. So he was in the middle of ruining the shrine, with the help of his zombies, when a young paladin all dressed up in white armor came rushing headlong on his white charger at Heartsblood.

Devon's zombies easily killed the paladin's mount. During the process, however, the paladin killed most of the zombies, which was sad. Devon was able to use his flail to knock the helmet clean off the young man. Several more blows allowed the evil cleric to destroy the paladin's shield. Heartsblood got the feeling the young paladin was torn between killing more zombies and attacking him. The cleric made that quandary easier as his flail ended the life of the paladin with the help of the remaining five zombies who also struck the unwise fighter with their unholy weapons. The paladin fell to the ground with a rather surprised look on his face. Paladins were all alike.

The cleric went back to his work with a happy song of unholiness on his lips.



Sword of the Ranger

Cebo was favored by all of the dwarven deities. She was an amazingly talented dwarf, skilled in the making of armor and weapons. Each of her crafted things was a masterwork of perfection. She'd done enough acts that pleased the dwarven gods that they all got together one night and debated how best to reward her. They'd never seen a dwarf of her type, and they wanted her to know how well they all thought of her. After a night's discussion, it was decided that Cebo would be given an unusual set of gifts. She would be placed high in the mountains near supplies of all the different metals. She would be given god-perfect tools and a forge, and she would then be allowed to create whatever she wanted for all eternity. Her location would be impossible to get to from the mountains around her, which would be fine with the solitary Cebo.

The next morning, Cebo awoke in her new dwarven home, and she was delighted at what she found. The tools that came to her hand were amazing in their quality. The enchanted forge worked itself to any heat she needed and never needed feeding. Life became wonderful for Cebo, and the gods all smiled down on her.

Cebo had been working for 312 years, and her chambers were filled with amazing weapons and pieces of armor. She had perfected metal hardening to its highest art. Her weapons would never need sharpening, especially the maces. Her armor would never dent, no matter how hard the blow. She was just finishing up a longsword with some very special properties, when a young ranger knocked on her door. It quite surprised Cebo, for in all the time she'd been there, she never had a visitor, especially a human one. She invited him in with a smile. The tall human was dressed in leather with metal rock-climbing gloves. A set of special climbing boots hung from his neck. His smile was infectious, and there was a look of awe and wonder on his face as he walked into the dwarf's home.

"How did you get up here to my home young human?" Cebo asked.

"I couldn't have made it, but for two recent rock falls that allowed me to gain heights I'd never gained before. I love climbing and have some skills in that area. My name is Lancelot, and I'm honored to meet you," the ranger replied.

"Good answer. Good answer, I'm Cebo. I haven't talked to another person in a long time. What do you think of my home?"

"It's amazing. My father is a blacksmith, and I thought I knew armor and metal until I came up here. Your house is wonderful. Is there anything I can do for you while I'm

here?" the ranger asked.

"Another fine answer," Cebo replied. "Pick some of the herbs in my garden and bring them in, and I will prepare a meal for us both."

Lancelot brought in a large batch of herbs and took some rock candy out of his pack.

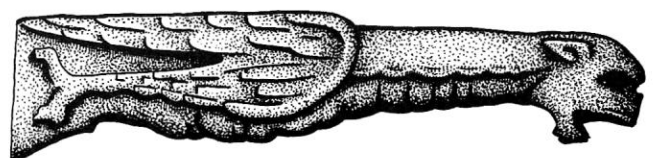
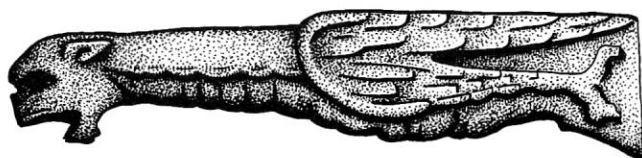
"Let me offer you desert," he said. "I hope you like rock candy. It's my favorite."

"I haven't had tata candy since I was a little girl. What a wonderful thought." Cebo smiled.

The pair ate and talked long into the night. The next morning, Cebo finished the sword she was working on and she handed it to the ranger.

"I think fate has meant you to take this sword with you. I didn't have a human in mind, but I'm pleased you have come," she said.

Lancelot hugged the tiny Cebo and climbed down the mountain and into history.



Fey Sword of the Bard

Bards are a curious lot. They have a tendency to poke their noses into places they should leave alone. One such bard was Preston of Harperville. Preston was a likely lad with great prospects. He was bright and talented, with a charming smile and winning ways. There was really nothing stopping Preston from greatness, save for Preston's heart. Preston was madly in love with the barbarian princess, Althiea of the Northern Marches. Preston could sing love songs to her all day long. He could compose love poetry for her that made every woman who heard it swoon with passion and tenderness. But Preston wasn't allowed to touch his virginal lady fair.

Everyone at court found Preston's love for the fair Althiea vastly amusing. Everyone, that is, but her brother, Alt. Alt was irritated every time Preston sang a song or recited a poem of love. He had his cronies beat Preston up one night, but this had the totally opposite effect of what he had intended. Now at court, Preston was suffering from his love. Now he was the darling child of the entire court, including Alt's sister. Alt wasn't pleased.

Preston wasn't a stupid man—far from it. He began to take instruction in other martial art forms. He was, however, still unable to win the touch of Althiea.

The bard started wandering the hills and forests of the kingdom. His muse drove him to practice his love songs alone in far-off fields. Whenever he was drawn back to court, he was welcomed with pity. Such a poor bard, the world would say, knowing the common man could never marry a princess. On Preston's return to court, Althiea's brother would increase the beatings, and he began making death threats. Preston would

then run away again.

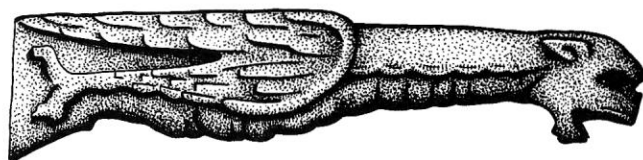
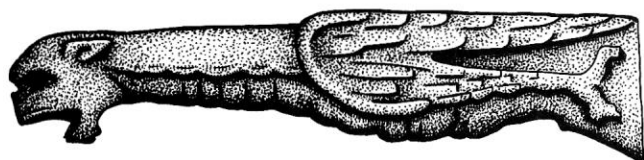
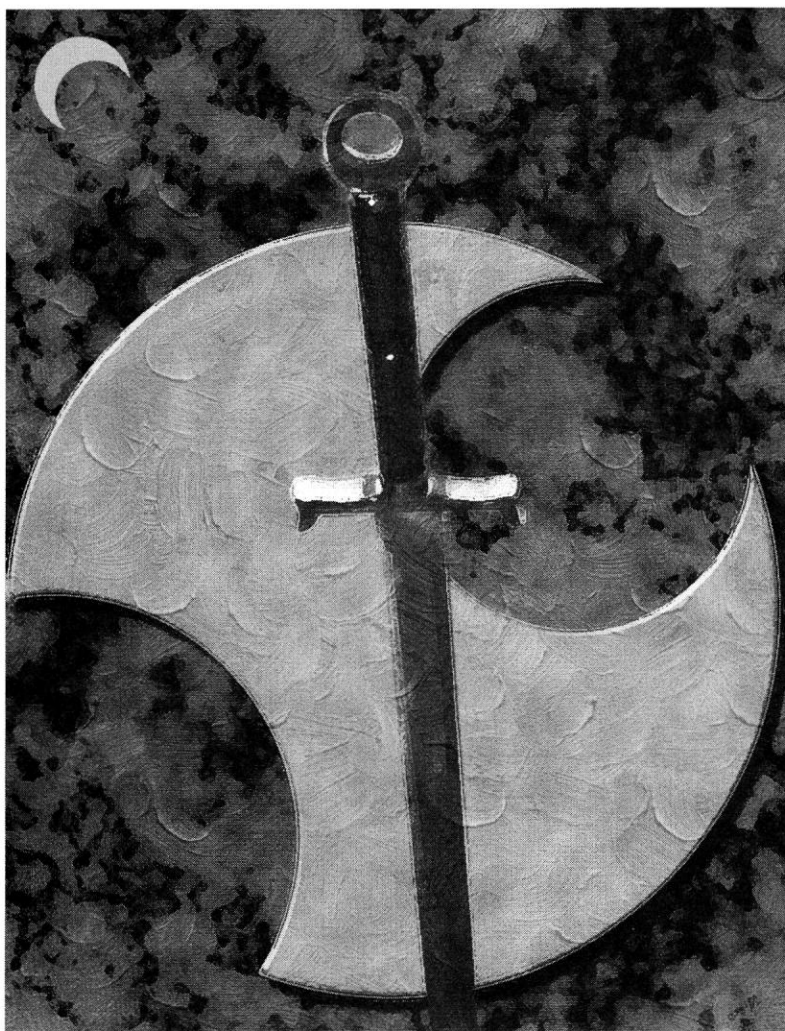
One night, with tears in his eyes, Preston made the mistake of singing and harping his love songs near a fairy mound. He delighted the enchanting elfin ladies of the magical court, and a noble elf lord invited him in to play for the king and queen. Preston was entranced by the magical glory of this kingdom under the earth. All the elfin ladies were fair of face and figure. The men were noble and could talk knowledgeably about music and art. Preston sang of his love for Althiea and moved the court to tears. In gratitude for his songs, the magic of the court healed his wounds, and the fairies offered to train him in the arts of war so that no one would be able to beat him again. Preston thought this a wonderful idea.

During the day, he was taught armed and unarmed fighting, and at night he would sing wondrous new songs for the elves. They treated him like a royal guest, and he had the best of everything. They even gave him an enchanted blade, a gift he treasured. At last his trainers pronounced him ready, and the king and queen of the court expressed their sadness at his leaving, but they

were happy they could make his life a little better. Preston left the faerie mound with a bright song in his heart and a smile on his lips. Life, he thought, would be much better for him now.

And life did change for him. Time, it seems, runs differently in enchanted lands. Preston discovered Althiea and Alt were dust, centuries gone, in their graves. Preston's songs were still sung in the much larger city of his homeland, but as old tunes of love. Preston walked the land, broken of heart, and his new songs were sad dirges of lost love.

In the years that followed, the still-young bard made his Althiea immortal. He also became known as the most deadly of swordsmen as he took his frustration out on the evildoers of the world.



Sword of the Rogue

When Seran-apt was just a wyrmling, the poor white dragon was backstabbed by a skilled human thief. The dragon suffered an incredible amount of damage from this attack and was forced to flee the field of battle to lick its wounds. From that day onward, the dragon acquired a taste for the flesh of rogues. In fact, the dragon made its life's work the art of eating rogues, and to lure them near, it began collecting types of treasures rogues loved to steal. In the dragon's young and juvenile periods, it roamed the cold kingdoms of the North. On purpose, it searched for goggles of minute seeing, hats of disguise, slippers of spider climbing, gloves of storing, bags of holding, ropes of climbing, ioun stones, and anything else that might appeal to rogues of all types. It also started letting a victim go from any city it sacked or caravan it raided. It would play with the victim a bit and then brag about all the treasures and magic items it had stored away in its cave of treasure at the end of the world. The cave wasn't really filled with treasure, yet. It was also deep in the heartlands of the human and dwarven kingdoms, but the dragon thought calling it that would impress the stupid. The dragon was right.

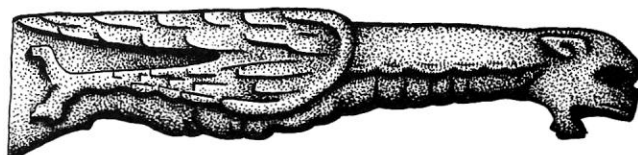
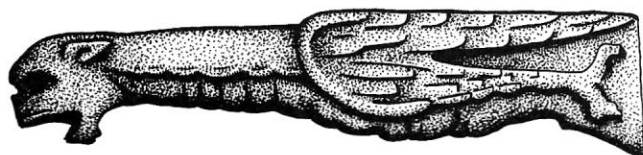
Venal Slipfingers was the head of the local chapter of the thieves' guild in the town of Aveyon. He was also in deep trouble. Several of his recent capers had gone very badly. When attempts were made to free his jailed people, those endeavors went even worse. He strongly suspected that he was in for a backstabbing if he couldn't turn things around. That's when he heard about a caravan merchant who had escaped a white dragon. It seems the

dragon bragged to this merchant about its lair in the mountains and the centuries of treasure stored there. The merchant was telling everyone how the dragon ate his entire caravan but him, then sleepily flew back to its cave high in the mountains. After a meal of hundreds of oxen and people, one would think a dragon would sleep for a long time—certainly long enough for a little pilfering on the edges of the huge treasure horde.

Venal led his best men to the narrow ledge in front of the dragon's cave. It was bitterly cold here, but the thieves' master had prepared for everything. His men were dressed warmly, and they all had equipment for climbing and stealing. Venal had prepared himself as well. This was to be his best theft ever. As the group peered into the lair of the dragon, vast treasure glowed in front of their eyes. Not 200 yards down a wide tunnel was a huge pile of bright gold, equipment, and gems. There were several kings' ransoms there in the frosty distance, and Venal was happy for the first time in years.

Moving quietly, so as not to wake any sleeping dragon, Venal's men entered the cave, and the first five promptly slipped and slid all the way down the iced slope to the treasure. Hearts beating fiercely, they lay still, but no dragon woke up. Splendid, Venal thought, and taking a more careful approach, the rest of his men carefully climbed down the slope to the treasure.

Naturally, the dragon was already awake. It breathed an icy blast and turned to rogue-circles all but one of the robbers. Venal's final preparation had been to swallow a magical potion, making him immune to the harmful effects of dragon breath. He left the cave thinking that becoming a bard might be a good idea, in some warm city, far from irritated white dragons. Life would become a happy song for Venal.



Elemental Blade of the South

A contest among kings was set up one year. Each would create a sword, and one special feature of that sword would set it apart from all other weapons in the world. Anything could be done to the weapon, and any amount of money could be spent. The only stipulation was that the weapon had to be functional in the hands of a trained bladesman, and the gods or other planar beings couldn't be enjoined to lend their touch to the creation of the weapon. A year and a day was set for the making of the blade, and impartial dwarven judges were paid large sums to judge the contest.

The King of the South was a clever man who came up with an astounding idea. Although it would seem that the contest was all about who could make the best sword, he thought it would be an interesting idea not only to make an amazing sword, but also to have the weapon guarded unusually well. He threw several million in gold into the creation of the sword, but he threw many times that into the sword's resting place. Over the course of the year, he supervised all of the engineers and smiths who worked in and around the sword's container. He never paid any attention to the design of the actual sword until the day before it was needed. When he heard what the weapon could do and saw its detailing, however, he was well satisfied. The day came to judge his weapon, and he was all smiles.

"Pull the lever," the king ordered

The golden lever caused all the traps to be suspended and reveal themselves. After the lever was pulled, the king and dwarven judges walked into the presentation chamber of the sword. Mirrors were everywhere in the chamber, and all were angled to show the sword resting on its pedestal in the center of the room.

The king walked in and took great pleasure describing each of the many traps exposed for the dwarven judges to see. The lever caused large panels to open, revealing ranks of poison arrows, batches of silver spears, enchanted scything blades, pods of deadly needles, deadly pits, and crushing stones. With every description, the dwarves jotted down notes on huge parchment scrolls, and the king's smile grew larger and larger. Almost as an afterthought, the king allowed the judges to pick up the sword, while the elfin sword-smiths talked of what had gone into the masterwork of this sword.

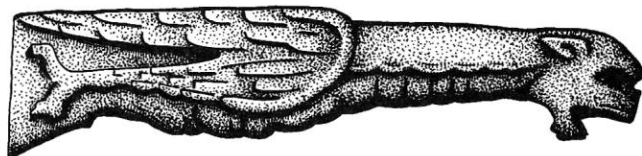
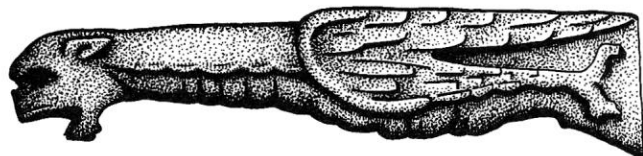
The king watched the dwarves as they noted the huge jewels in the sheath. He noticed a look of

greed flash into their eyes and was pleased.

The elves went on and on about the quality of the blue-white diamonds in the quillons and the special emeralds and rubies that were shaped into the sheath of the weapon. They waxed eloquent concerning the silver dust specially poured into the blood groove of the long blade. A great deal of conversation was spent on the empathy of the intelligent blade and what that feature could do in battle situations.

The dwarves surprised the king by requesting a sword practice post be brought into the area. One was summoned, and in minutes one of the dwarves was slashing and thrusting with the sword into post. Huge chunks of wood went flying with every stroke. Many more notes were taken.

The dwarves told the king their decisions would be announced in 30 days, but they were certainly impressed with the way the weapon was guarded and the quality of the blade itself. They left with respectful bows, and the king was well satisfied that he would be winning this simple contest. Leaving the chamber, the king reset the traps, and the weapon was promptly forgotten to history.



Blade of the North

The King of the North was a practical man, a general of many battles, and a fine swordsman himself. It was his belief that a sword was a sword was just a sword, and the real quality behind a blade was in the person using the weapon. To prove this, he instructed his weaponsmiths to forge the best magical blade they could forge, using the highest quality materials, and he gave them a deadline of 300 days.

The king then announced a huge fencing contest with a prize large enough to attract the best fencers in every land. For the next seven months, bladesmen and women from all lands came streaming into the northern kingdom. All were housed for free and allowed to practice their art in front of qualifying judges. Many of the odder weapons' masters were excused because their blades were too unlike the one being made and their skills weren't suited to a longsword. In the final analysis, five skilled sword-people would enter the final contest. There were four men and a female elf. All of them were remarkable for different reasons.



Conack was seven feet tall and bull strong. He never got tired, even after hours of blade practice. Most longswords appeared as slim but deadly toothpicks in his hands.

Deverindal of the hills was a blade-thin man with huge wrists. He could handle a sword equally well with his right or left hand. He purposely used a switching of hands tactic in all of his fighting matches to throw off his opponents.

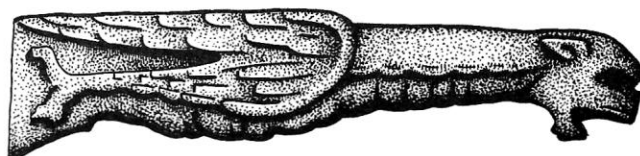
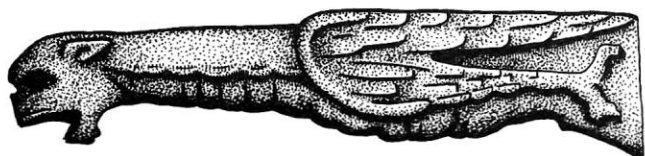
Mancalla of Eastwick was a massive dwarf who had been fencing for over 100 years. He claimed to know all the sword forms and enjoyed calling out his attack maneuvers as he fought.

Sir Onult was a cavalier for the cities of the south. A skilled fighter, used to waging war in heavy armor and on a war-horse, he claimed to quite enjoy the little fencing contest, as he put it. Since armor wasn't allowed in the fencing circles, the knight's great strength and speed allowed him to move like lightning.

Allure was a female elf with a stunning feminine figure. The first day of the competition, she walked into the qualifying chamber in a form fitting leather uniform that barely covered any of her lovely charms. Her smile was daz-

zling, and her voice was music to the ears. Her long white hair fell to her waist, and it constantly moved in disconcerting ways. She announced her desire for the trial and told the judges that she had been studying fencing for 300 years. She had no trouble in the early trials, as she displayed unusual dexterity and speed, allowing her to quickly gain three touches on every opponent. Of the four other contestants, Deverindal was the only one to give her problems, but she bested him after an hour, and the privilege of guarding the Blade of the North fell into her charming hands.

The King of the North presented his sword with Allure as the guardian. At first, the dwarves weren't impressed by this attractive elf. The fighters among the judges couldn't touch her with a blade, and she easily disarmed them all. Her commanding presence and diplomacy skills awed the judges as much as her skills with the magical blade. The dwarves took down massive notes on the weapon and Allure. They even showed her the weapon from the King of the South and asked her opinion, which she gave in honest detail. They took more notes and demanded that Allure accompany them to the last two kingdoms. The King of the North smiled at their measure of his guardian's worth and magnanimously allowed her to go with the judging group along with his blade. He was confident he'd won as they left.



Elemental Blade of the East

The ruler of the Kingdom of the East was a wizard of great power. He saw this contest as a chance to practice his magic and grow stronger in the art. Like the other kings, he ordered a magical blade made, but he gave a set of exacting instructions on the type of metal and special symbols to go into the construction of the weapon. There were also some other interesting facets he thought he would build into the features of the blade.

The day of the judging came, and the five dwarves and Allure rode into the city. There was an honor guard of halberd troopers in front of the palace. Another honor guard of elephants and archers lined a 100-yard-square area in front of the entrance to the palace. The military might of the kingdom was on display, and it impressed the judges. Allure wasn't impressed, but she couldn't help but theorize how many of these men she could kill with her new sword before she herself was killed. She didn't like her estimates.

The palace was huge and all of black marble. As the judging party was guided to the king's chamber, it passed by four different elementals, all imprisoned in large pentagrams. The earth elemental and fire elemental were huge creatures, towering over everyone. The air elemental and the water elemental clearly weren't happy with their captivity, as they were constantly bashing against the barriers of the spell that contained them.

The evil wizard king sat on a throne made from a single red ruby. He didn't look like a man to trifle with.

"Welcome judges," he said. "I hope you had a pleasant journey."

The dwarves and Allure bowed deeply in front of the king. He commanded respect, and there was something deadly about his smile that sent shivers up each of their spines. Allure knew she would never be given the chance to sheath her blade in this foe's heart if she had to battle.

Curtains were opened to the side

of the hall, and the kingdom's prize sword was revealed in its stand. There was a chopping pole to one side of the weapon.

"We would like to use Allure to test the weapon and spar with a few of your best swordsmen, if that wouldn't be a problem?" the lead judge said.

"That won't be possible, I'm afraid," the wizard replied. "Let me show you why. I've placed some very special conditions on this blade. Observe." The wizard took the weapon from its resting-place, and the judges and Allure could instantly see the wizard wasn't a swordsman by the way he held the weapon. He chopped once at the fresh, unmarked pole, and in seconds the pole was in thousands of pieces on the floor.

"I've bound four invisible creatures of the air to the sword," the wizard explained. "These stalkers will destroy anything the weapon strikes at. Also, were you impressed by the military force outside my palace?"

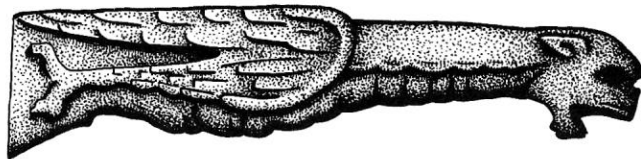
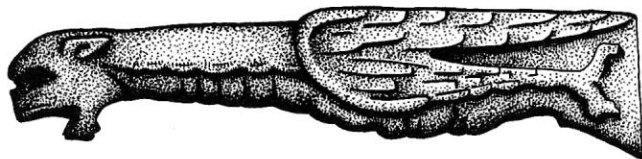
The judges agreed that they were impressive.

"Those troops are all skilled mercenary fighters and all bound to this sword and its wielder for five years," the wizard continued. "As are the four powerful elemental forces you walked by in the palace. Whoever uses this sword will have some of the greatest fighting forces in the world working along side him. An unusual idea, don't you think?"

The judges quickly went through the examining process. They were clearly awed by the power the wizard king could summon up for his weapon. They were very hesitant to inform the wizard that they would have to take the weapon with them for the final judging.

He smiled at them, "If this is what the other kings have allowed so be it. I would do nothing to influence your decision. I believe I know what the result of this contest will be. Please stay in my city and rest for a week and then go where you will."

A week later, the dwarves took the sword and left the city, followed by an army of troops and elephants, four terrifying elementals, and four invisible monsters constantly at the side of the dwarf carrying the sword.



Dwarven Blade of the West

The human King of the West was the most skilled diplomat of the group. It had been his idea for this contest, and he was very pleased with the diplomatic results the venture was having on the four kingdoms. The Kings of the South and North were actually talking to each other and exchanging caravans of goods instead of armies of death. Discovering that the referees were to be dwarves, the King of the West did everything he could to increase his chances of success. His swordsmiths were hired from a nearby dwarven kingdom. He built a special section of his city for dwarves, and encouraged dwarven merchants and troopers to come and work in his city. During the year of the sword's creation, dwarven architecture and statues were imported for display in the palace and the city.

The king tried to find the homeland of the dwarven judges, to bring in some of their people, but he failed in this effort. These judges didn't seem to be from any of the dwarven holdings for a thousand miles in every direction.

As the judges arrived at the city, they were wined and dined for several days on the finest of dwarven foods and drink. The elf Allure caused a moment's surprise for the king, but he quickly recovered and summoned his elf ambassadors to talk with her and make her happy. The dwarves slept in dwarven beds, in rooms decorated in the dwarven traditions, and were served by dwarven servants and cooks. Their every desire was met and then exceeded. Needless to say, they couldn't help but be pleased with the way they were being treated.

Finally the day of the judging dawned bright and clear and the dwarves and Allure, almost waddling from all the food they had been eating in the last four days, were brought to the kingdom's prize weapon. The dwarven swordsmiths talked in the language of the dwarves about the

creation of the blade. An elf translator was hired for Allure, and she bowed to the great king for this thoughtful gesture.

The dwarves measured and took many notes on the blade. As part of the testing process, they told the king they would be taking the weapon and the other blades outside the city for private examination. The king smiled and said, "Of course."

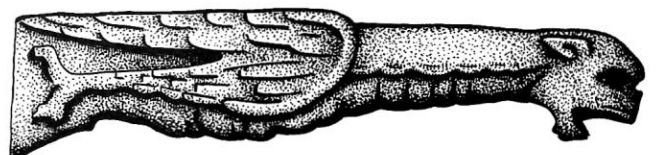
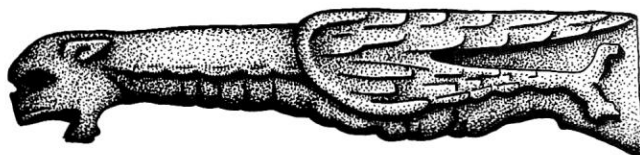
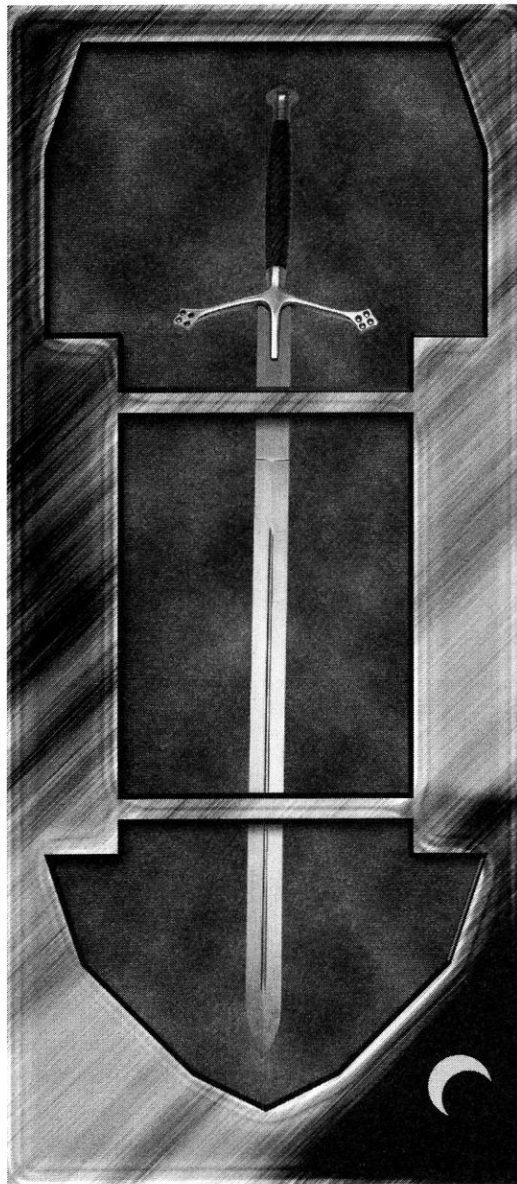
He was on the battlements with his followers, watching the group move to the plains in front of the city. Lost in thought, the king wasn't happy with what the other kings had done with their blades. All of them had good ideas, but the King of the East really impressed the King of West with the large army and the fierce elementals that sword commanded.

"Isn't that an interplanar gate appearing on the plane?" his court wizard suddenly asked.

"Why yes," the king replied, "I think you are correct. I wonder what... No! It can't be! Summon the cavalry! Get them out there and..."

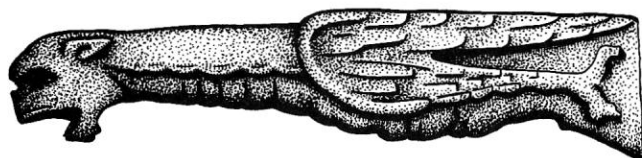
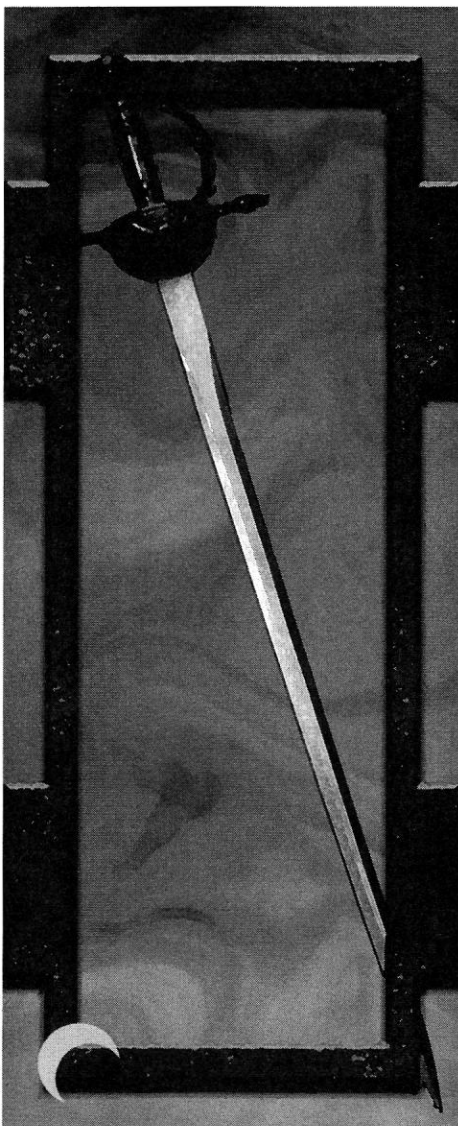
It was clearly too late. The dwarves, Allure, the elementals, and all of the mercenary army went into the magical gate and vanished. Those tricky dwarves had stolen the four most magical blades on this or any other plane. The kings had been duped. The King of the West shook his head and sent out invitations to the other three kings with a short message explaining what had happened. He could only hope that all three of them wouldn't be invading his kingdom to get their swords back. This wasn't going to be a good year.

He still thought his blade was the best. He began wondering if there was some other way to judge the blades now that they were gone. He didn't even consider chasing after the things. Traveling the planes was wizards' work. Maybe he could give some aid to the King of the East, but he never really liked the man.



Dragonkind City Blade

The gods are funny creatures. In the course of their influence on this prime material plane, they found it necessary for there to be a highly magical city filled with highly magical inhabitants. They determined this type of city would spawn all sorts of useful items and benefits for all of the gods. A rather large debate began among the different factions of the pantheon on how that city should be created. After several hundred years of talking, a magical sword was produced. It would be the heart of the city, and its magic would help the wielder create just the type of city needed by the gods. With any luck at all, some type of wizard would quickly grasp it, and the city would be magically created in days and begin serving all the



pantheon's gods.

A rather large gold dragon was dispatched with the weapon to a lovely meadow in the middle of the largest continent on the plane. There were several likely lads in that area who could easily take the sword and begin a city. All they had to do was have the courage to talk the dragon out of the weapon.

In the first hundred years, no one traveled past the dragon glen. That didn't bother the dragon or the gods. Both were unusually patient. In the second hundred years, the dragon became covered in a lot of earth and brush, but that was no problem for the nearly immortal beast. In the third hundred-year period, even the long-lived deities were beginning to wonder if their sword would ever get used.

Mat the shepherd's son was the youngest of seven boys. He was going to be a shepherd when he grew up, even if his big brothers said he wasn't good for anything. Today, however, he'd wandered a little far afield from the camp wagon. At sunset, he managed to be standing right in front of the dragon's head, now looking more like a statue than a real dragon.

"Hey, Mr. Dragon, is you for real?" he shouted.

The dragon opened his eyes, which promptly made the small boy fall on his backside. The boy was able to not quite cry as he looked into the liquid gold orbs of the beast.

"Good evening, young human," the dragon replied. "I am indeed real, as such things are counted. What do you do here?"

"Oh, I'm looking for another sword. The stick I was using broke over there when I struck it on that rock. My big brothers say shepherds don't use swords, but I think they are wrong. What do you think?"

"I think you will become a sword-using shepherd," the dragon answered. "I have a sword for you, and my instructions are that you may call on me for assistance once a year and I will come to your call." The dragon slid the weapon out from under its chin and the blade was longer than the young boy was tall.

With a cry of delight, the boy took the sword's handle and dragged the blade in the dirt. That made the dragon wince, but the weapon was the boy's to do with as he willed. The dragon walked behind the child until it found its way to his worried parents. The beast again told the adults that the weapon was a gift and the dragon would be available once a year for any reasonable request.

That is how the city of Dragonkind came to be set up high in the mountains instead of the nice flat plain where the gods intended it to be. That is also how the city became called Dragonkind, as the child who first wielded the sword of the gods wasn't very grammatical and really meant the kind dragon.



Takenel, Dwarven Blade

The King of the Dwarves Under the Great Mountain needed a sword. It was fall, and he knew there would be a series of battles in the spring with the orcs. He called together his five brothers, who just happened to be the five best swordsmiths in the world. He asked them to make him a blade and have it ready for the spring battles with the orcs. He told them he didn't want a fancy sword, just something that would be dependable and get the job done for him. The brothers all nodded their heads and said that wouldn't be a problem. They loved their brother dearly and wanted him to have the best equipment possible. So they all set to work on a new blade, with the best intentions.

Brother Axecleaver forged the purest adamantine he could find and imbued it with deep magical strength. He placed a magical combat enhancement on the weapon because he loved his brother the king and he wanted the best for him.

Brother Hammerthrower worked the metal and gave the blade as much intelligence as he could without it becoming a distraction to the sword user. He also added a magical combat enhancement to the weapon, even though his brother had asked for a simple blade.

Brother Pikesplitter poured a great deal of spell magic into the blade and added a combat enhancement of his own to the weapon. He knew his brother wanted a simple weapon, but Pikesplitter really wanted to give his king and beloved brother something as useful as possible.

Brother Daggerbender was the most skilled of the weapon making dwarves, and he gave the creation of this weapon his all. This dwarf didn't like spell casters, as he'd taken several fireballs and lightning bolts in the chest in his time. Even though his brother the king wanted a simple weapon, Daggerbender gave the blade a special purpose to slay spell casters. As an afterthought, he placed a magical combat enhancement on the weapon, as he was sure his brothers wouldn't think of doing that.

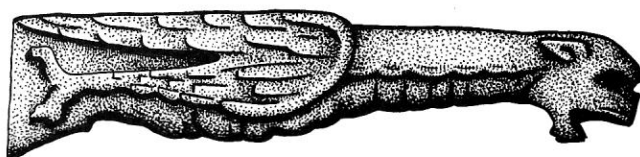
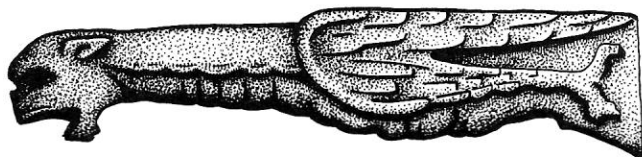
Brother Swordshaper got the weapon last and decided that it needed some special features. He made sure fear would be put into the hearts of his brother's enemies when they faced him and his sword. Swordshaper also made sure his brother's abilities would be enhanced every time he drew the sword. Finally, he placed a magical combat enhancement on the sword, sure that his brothers wouldn't think of doing that.

The king's five brothers presented the weapon to their brother, and as the king drew the blade, the enchanted ego of the weapon took possession of the mind of the king. He raised the weapon into the air and shouted, "Let's not wait till spring for the orcs. To war!"

The king of the dwarves led his many powerful armies to war and killed thousands of orcs in the process. Unfortunately, he died himself in the process, and the weapon fell to the hands of brother Axecleaver. Taking up the weapon, he was promptly controlled by it, and he was heard to shout, "To war!" He led the powerful dwarven army against the deadly hobgoblins and routed them off the continent. In the process, however, he was killed himself.

The blade was given next to Hammerthrower, but before he could pick it up, his loving brother Swordshaper held his hand back. "Brother," Swordshaper said, "we wrought too well with that king's blade. I strongly urge you to hang it in the king's hall in a place of honor and pick a little less able weapon to rule with."

Hammerthrower took his brother's advice, and the sword Takenel went into the legends of the dwarves as both the best and worst weapon the dwarves had ever created.



Dagger of Birthright

Few events in a royal family are more exciting than the birth of a new heir. In the kingdom of Heddingsol, the arrival of a new prince or princess is marked by numerous parties and gatherings, culminating in a naming ceremony for the newest member of the family. At this event, the tiny heir is presented with fabulous gifts and the many good wishes of those present.

Perhaps no gift is so important as the Dagger of Birthright, which is presented to the new prince or princess by his parents. All such daggers are uniquely designed for their recipient, and are endowed with certain wondrous powers chosen by the child's mother, father, and the wizards who enchant the dagger. The powers selected for these weapons nearly always include protections for the infant and signals of approaching danger, as well as magical aids that will assist the royal owner later in life.

Shortly after their marriage, the king and queen designed six different daggers to be made as future gifts for their children. Each dagger required at least six months and sometimes a full year to craft. With the daggers prepared, the enchanting could begin as quickly as necessary.

So it was that King Alfred and Queen Rymia of Heddingsol consulted with their court wizards upon learning that the queen was with child. The crafting of a magical blade demands several months of work, so the process is always begun as soon as the queen's happy news is made known.

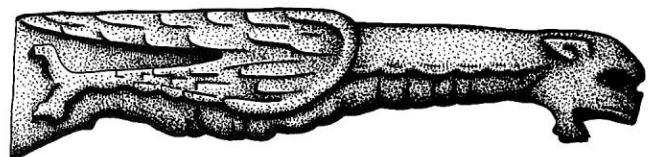
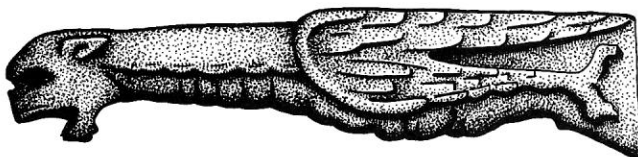
Alfred and Rymia began with a long list of magical gifts they wished to imbue into their child's dagger. Indeed, the list was far too long, but the wizards assured the royal couple that they could blend many enchantments for a common purpose and yield most of the results that they specified. The king and queen selected a dagger with the finest steel blade, an intricate

golden hilt and pommel, and a sheath wrapped in dragon's skin and set with sapphires and jet. The wizards locked themselves away for the next six months to concentrate on the task of enchanting the wondrous blade.

Working with dragon's blood, rare metals, exotic barks and fungi, the feathers and claws of magical creatures, and locks of the king and queen's hair, a dozen wizards labored over the blade night and day for many long months. The final ingredient needed was the queen's life-giving fluid that sustained the baby until its birth. The joyous day finally arrived, and a tiny prince was born. The wizards collected their ingredient and set themselves to performing the final stage of their enchantment.

Two weeks later came the happy occasion of Prince Gammen's naming ceremony. Many rare and wonderful gifts were set before the baby, with the Dagger of Birthright presented as the final gift. The wizards held up the prince's dagger for all to see, then demonstrated certain powers. From the king's trophy room, the wizards brought forth the dried husk of a dead beholder, and the dagger glowed faintly with a sickly green light. In the presence of the wizards' crystal ball, the sword glowed pale yellow. Without warning, the dagger glowed red—and one of the wizards materialized before the crowd, having turned himself invisible. A royal hound was brought into the room, and one of the wizards took the dagger and seemed to converse with the animal. The wizards assured all who were present that the dagger had many more powers that the prince would learn as he grew older.

Years passed, and the prince became quite accomplished with the magical qualities of his dagger. But the fates would never allow the young man to take his father's place as king. At the age of fourteen, Prince Gammen was thrown from a horse and killed instantly. He was buried in the family crypt deep below the castle, with the dagger he called Wyrrgil placed at his side.



Queen's Sword of Light

The kingdom of Heddingsol is known for its numerous and highly talented sorcerers. So it is no wonder that the royalty of Heddingsol are fond of giving enchanted gifts to their loved ones. New princes and princesses are given specially designed magical swords or daggers at their naming ceremonies when they are only a few weeks old, and other gifts of magical weapons are customary.

One of the most important of these gifts is the Queen's Blade, which may take the form of a dagger or a short or long sword. A prince begins designing such a weapon for his future wife as soon as he becomes engaged, and the blade is presented to her following the wedding ceremony. These weapons are designed for the safety and comfort of the queen, should she ever need to defend herself or should she need magical aid. While they are certainly heirloom quality blades, each queen is buried with her own sword upon her demise as a symbol of the realm's promise to protect her forever.

Several years ago, when Prince Walvnor became engaged to the Lady Vimmil, the young prince designed a sword for his future bride with the help of the court wizards. He began with a long list of powers to imbue into the blade, then narrowed his choices to those that seemed most useful day to day or in an emergency. He removed from the list such niceties as a fragrance (changeable upon the whim of the queen) and the ability for the sword to change color to suit the queen's wardrobe. Instead, Walvnor chose that the weapon, a short sword, should help the queen in combat and help her find her way home, among

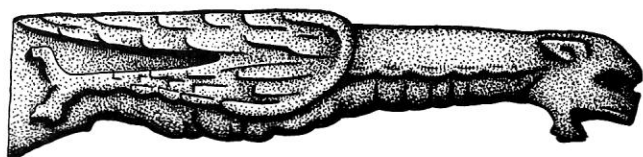
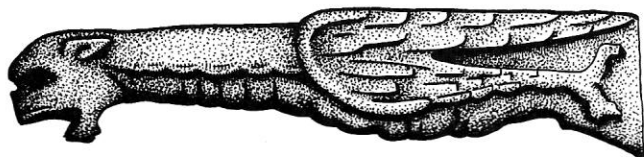
other things. The court wizards concluded their magics promptly and the sword was presented to Queen Vimmil following the wedding ceremony.

Unfortunately, Queen Vimmil found a use for her sword all too soon. About a year after their marriage, the queen was traveling within Heddingsol and her entourage was attacked by bandits. The troupe was so large as to almost be an army, and they succeeded in kidnapping the queen. The entire realm went on high alert in order to save the

queen, and eventually she was found and rescued. Nearly all the bandits were slain, but of the few who escaped, one got away with the queen's sword. The king and queen designed a new Queen's Blade, and the former one became the object of adventure for numerous folk in the realm. Adventurers soon came from far and wide across the continent to try their luck at finding the famous sword.

The bandit who escaped with the blade eventually decided that it was too feminine for his taste; in addition, the sword was terrible in combat. The bandit guessed that the smith who had forged it had done something terribly wrong in weighting or balancing the blade, for the bandit had nearly lost his life twice while fighting with the sword. The bandit eventually sold the sword in a far-off land for a tidy sum, but the amount was barely a tenth of the sword's true value.

Adventurers who hunt for the blade would do well to search markets and fairs where second-hand weapons are sold. The Queen's Sword of Light currently resides with a seedy dealer named Gruk, who knows only that he has "a nice, pretty, girly sword" for sale. He is eager to be rid of it and recoup the money he spent on it, for he has traveled with the sword for nearly two years without finding a buyer.



Razor's Edge

History

Dael Trindle was a squire lacking of skill. Many doubted whether or not he would ever attain knighthood, let alone live to the age greater than thirty summers. Were it not for the fact his great-grandfather was a former Champion of the Land, the greatest title a knight could receive, Dael would still be shoveling horse dung in the King's stables. His father, a chamberlain in the royal court, begged the Captain of the Guard to give him a chance to bring some form of honor to the Trindle house. Dael's father had little hope this would happen, but he had to try.

As a warrior, Dael Trindle was mediocre at best. There were times when he could barely wield a longsword, let alone carry his charger's armor. In fact, the other squires often took bets as to whether or not he would live through a conflict or even daily training. Luck appeared to be on Dael's side, however, as he lived through several skirmishes with local bandits as well as a small army of invading humanoids. It was after the latter battle that Dael discovered an exceptional-looking dagger on the body of a beheaded kobold. The squire offered the blade to his knight, but was told to keep it since the blade's size as less effective for the mounted combat of a knight. The blade was claimed by Dael, and would later come to be known as Razor's Edge.

Discovery

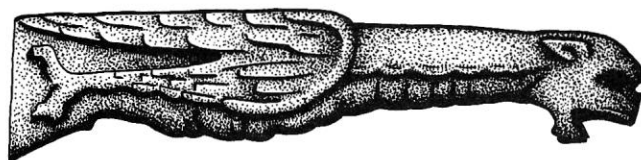
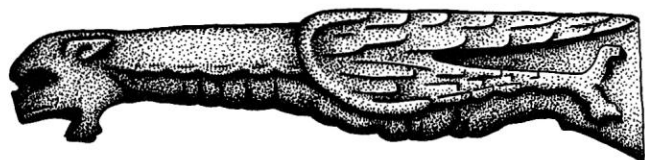
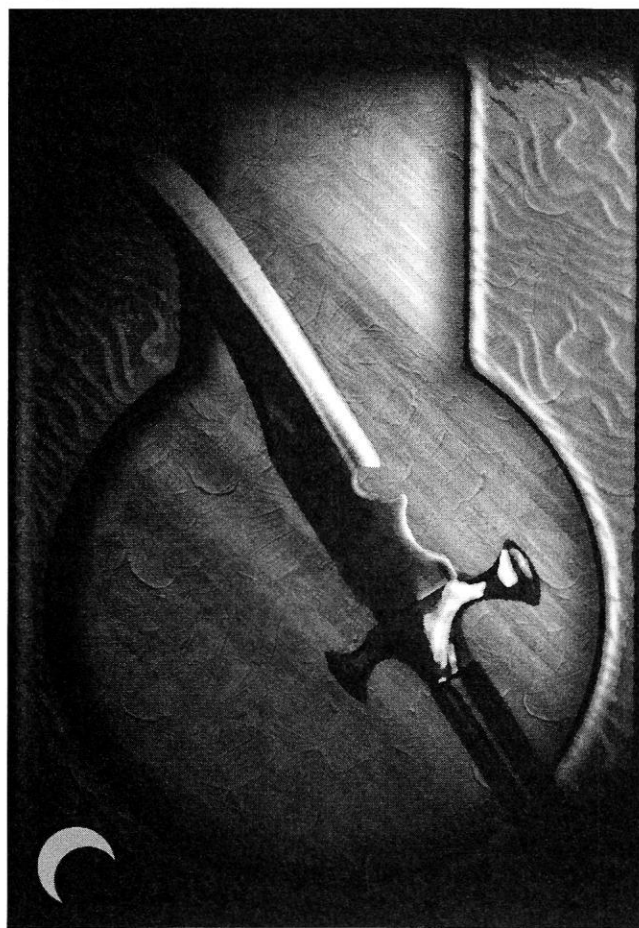
The young squire was enchanted with the blade, for finally he had a weapon he could truly call his own. For weeks he practiced with the long dagger in his off hours, getting used to it's superior weight and balance. Even though he was a novice, Dael could tell the weapon was of exceptional quality and value. He was about to petition his father to have the blade magically identified by the King's wizard when something unusual happened. Though his skill was improving with the superior blade, Dael was still an amateur in combat. While using it during a training drill with other squires, Dael accidentally dropped the weapon on the stone courtyard - and the weapon buried itself to the hilt in the cold granite like a hot knife through butter. All commotion in the courtyard paused in amazement as Dael withdrew the blade from the stone, marveling at what just occurred.

That afternoon a tribunal of knights gathered to decide what to do about this apparently powerful magical weapon. Some argued the blade should be given to the knighthood, or even the King himself. Others were more selfish, sighting that skill and seniority gave them the right to claim the weapon for their own. After several

knights presented their reasons the weapon should belong to them, the current Champion of the Land, Sir Clifton of the Sun, stepped forward. Instead of proclaiming a reason the dagger should belong to him, the knight address all that would lay claim to the blade.

"Have any of the valiant knights before me even asked the squire Dael Trindle if they can have his dagger? It does, after all, belong to him. Have the knights of the realm become so arrogant they must steal from a squire? Are not the virtues of a knight bravery and honesty above all? From what I've been told the young squire offered the weapon to his own master, who rejected it because it is not his weapon of choice. I do not see him here recounting his claim - do you? It is without a doubt that this blade is made of powerful magic, but does that along give it the right to be owned by a knight? I believe the weapon belongs to the squire."

With such strong words coming from the Champion of the Land, all withdrew their claim to the item. Sir Clifton proclaimed the blade "Razor's Edge", and presented it to Dael in the name of the King. Tragically, the next day Dael was found dead in his quarters, and Razor's Edge was gone. A considerable reward, offered by Sir Clifton himself, will be presented for the return of the dagger and the apprehension of Dael Trindle's killer.



Tooth of the Dragon

Flasshadentorna was a young female red dragon in search of wealth and power. Called Flassh for short by others of her kind, she was a typical dragon of her color: brash, malevolent, greedy, and harboring a deep loathing for humans and elves. While she was still a wyrmling of less than 10 years, Flassh began searching the realm for a lair and a horde of treasure to go with it. Even at such a young age the female red dragon knew the virtue of having a secure lair and plenty of food at her disposal. The search did not last long, and Flassh easily found her first lair atop a remote mountain not far by wing from two kingdoms of considerable size and wealth. Farm cattle and horses, not to mention farmers and riders, kept Flassh sated for years between long sleeps. Then came a time when the young red was ready to mate.

Five red dragons sought out Flasshadentorna on her first mating cycle, ranging in age from very young to very old, all excellent candidates in the female's eyes. To the surprise of all Flassh select the youngest of the five, one who was almost half her size, dismissing the rest in a blast of fiery breath. Weeks later, after Flassh was sure she would give birth, the audacious female attacked the unsuspecting male. Inexperienced in combat, the male

dragon was an easy target and did not last long against the seasoned female.

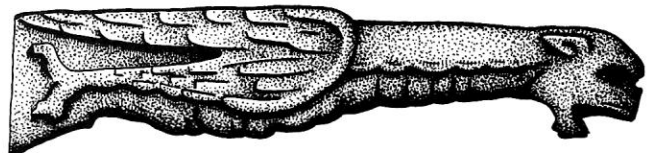
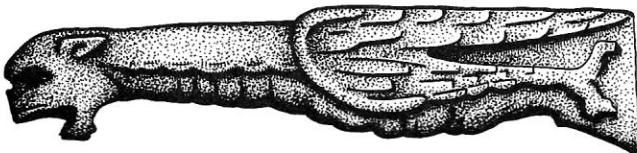
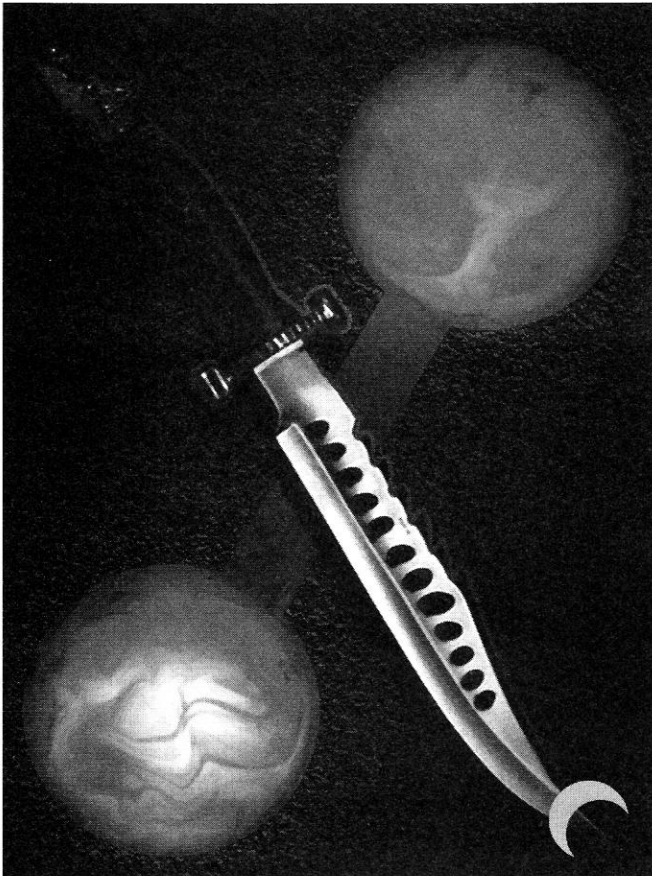
Afterwards, Flassh traded the body of the young dragon to a group of nearby duergar for a literal hoard of treasure. The duergar approached Flassh some time before asking to purchase one or more of her teeth in exchange for thousands of pounds of gold they had mined over the years. While unwilling to part with her own teeth, Flassh saw an opportunity to deal with the vile dwarves when the young male answered her breeding call. Even though Flassh tripled the fee for a whole dragon, the duergars happily paid the greedy red dragon.

Known as the Du'marr Clan, this local group of duergar were expert miners and craftsmen who sold their wares to several of the more unscrupulous factions outside the Underdark realms. One of the more skilled duergar weaponsmiths found a way to create weapons where the hilt was crafted from a creature's bone—and would be more effective against said beast. In other words, the duergar wanted dragon teeth to make dragonslayer weapons - unbeknownst to the treacherous Flasshadentorna.

With a mouthful of teeth from the red dragon slain by Flassh, the duergar were able to construct hundreds of blades, each one earning the name Tooth of the Dragon. While there were several different styles of bladed weapon, the majority of these dragonslaying blades were daggers, better suited for the duergar's size—and the task ahead of gaining back their payment from Flasshadentorna. Though many years had passed the duergar had not forgotten about the greedy female, and the exorbitant amount of gold the wicked dwarves had paid for the dragon carcass.

Each armed with a Tooth of the Dragon, fifty duergar warriors stormed the dragon's cave when next they thought Flassh would be in a sleep cycle. To their surprise, the female dragon and her hoard of gold were gone; however, in her place was the young offspring of Flasshadentorna. Instead of killing the wyrmling, the duergar injured and captured the beast and spirited him deep below ground. While red dragons are not known for protecting their young, it was possible Flassh could someday return and the duergar didn't want their treachery to be discovered.

Currently, the duergar are unsure of what to do with the very young red dragon. As for the many blades named Tooth of the Dragon, several hundred were sold by the duergar to compensate for not retrieving their hoard of gold. These blades are often found in the hands of criminals and evil cultists, personalities who showed interests similar to those of the heinous dwarves. All dragons will know the true nature of these blades on site, and will likely attack first in any conflict.



Wizard Ren's Knife

Ren was the most powerful wizard of his age. Though he was a humble man, his power was so great that others feared him just because they knew what he was capable of at need. There were only two known enemies of the wizard Ren. One of them was currently a stone statue in front of his castle. The head of that statue was alive and could talk to passersby, but he was quite insane by now. The other foe was an evil and powerful cleric who was currently residing in a magical painting in a small art museum Ren kept on the castle grounds. Viewers could see the cleric moving about a small apartment in the oil painting, but the cleric couldn't tell where he was.

The legends surrounding Ren were awesome and grew constantly in the telling. Using a death ray, he did indeed slay a terrible dragon. He didn't really slay the seven offspring of the dragon, but he did subdue them. He did indeed destroy an awesomely powerful demon general at the head of a huge army of outer planer beings. He didn't slay the demon general's army, as they were too useful for plans Ren had for the outer planes. Ren's list of accomplishments went on and on and often made Ren turn red in the face when others praised him.

One day he was working in his magical chambers, and

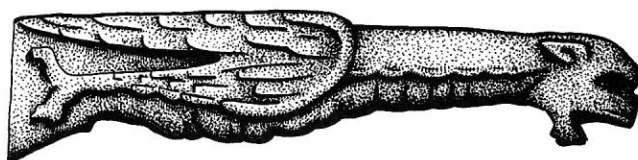
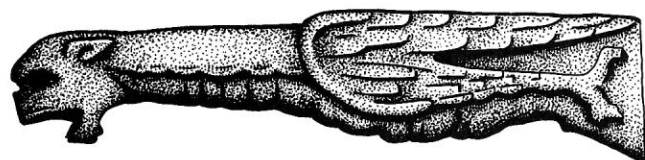
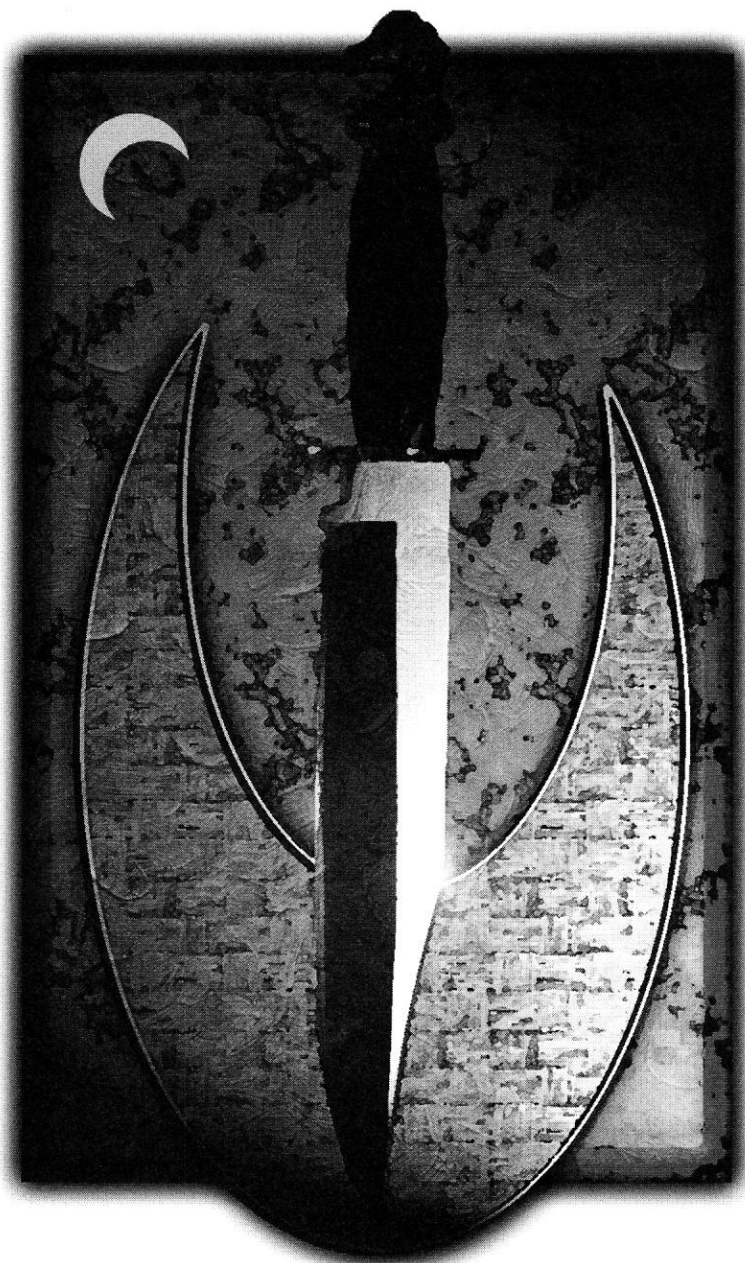
he asked his assistant, Vocater, to order an enchanted knife for him. Ren told his magical subordinate that he didn't want anything too special. He thought it would be useful to have a knife with some fire capabilities. Vocater bowed to his master and left the chamber with his new assignment.

Vocater appeared to be a six-foot-tall elfin male. He had pleasing facial features and a well-toned body, and he dressed extremely well at all times. He also had pearly, opalescent eyes and an almost unnoticeable radiant glow to his very white skin. Vocater wasn't even close to human, however, being a Ghaele. Often his most pressing activity was trying to understand the human condition. He was Ren's assistant, and Ren tried to teach him the ways of humans, all humans. It was a relationship that had spanned several hundred years thus far, and both parties were very satisfied with the other.

Vocater came to Ren to destroy him several centuries ago. Naturally, Ren had objected, and the resulting tussle left both combatants exhausted after 30 hours of enchanted battling. When they took the time to talk to each other, after their second rest period, they discovered many things they had in common. Vocater stayed to study Ren a little, and both had agreed to a truce so

that they could kill each other at some future date.

So Vocater's current assignment was to get Ren a knife with fire capabilities. The Ghaele did some research in



Ren's library and discovered that dwarves were the best at crafting blades. His research gave him several different leads on fire and its various forms. From this data, it was a simple process to contact the various beings that would be used in building the desired object. Since gold and services weren't an object in the creating of the product, Vocater was liberal with both purse and construction design specifications.

Vocater started with the dwarves. Finding the best weapon's maker on the prime material plane, he instructed the dwarf that he wanted a wizard's knife made from the finest materials. The dwarf saw this celestial coming a mile away and charged him 500,000 gold for the weapon and another 500,000 gold for quick delivery. Vocater paid half up front and went to his other stops.

He hadn't visited the plane of elemental fire in over a thousand years. He was glad to see the place hadn't changed much. After conversing with the emperor of the elementals, he was able to borrow just the right fire elemental from a newly created gaggle of them. He acquired the services of the creature for a very reasonable sum in ioun stones and magically stored the fire creature away in a bar of silver.

Trying to show as much initiative as possible, the Ghaele went to the elemental plane of air as well. In his dealings with the emperor of the air elementals, he traded for the ability to extinguish fires. It was Vocater's opinion that if the blade could generate fire, it might be a handy feature for it to put out such blazes as well. All the emperor asked was for him to attack and kill 20 water elementals that had unlawfully invaded the plane of the air elementals. It only took Vocater two weeks to kill those creatures. He checked this knife feature off his list and smiled at another task well done.

Vocater had heard rumors about dragons being disagreeable creatures. He had dealt only with lawful ones in the past. As he began negotiating with an amazingly large red dragon, the creature actually tried to eat him. Quite amused, the celestial decided to teach the creature a valuable life lesson. He stripped the fiery essence from the dragon. It would no longer be able to breathe fire for the rest of its life. Vocater didn't feel a bit sorry for the red wyrm; it had attacked him, after all.

The celestial also took the time to address another need of Ren's. For several decades, Vocater thought it would be a good idea to give the wizard some type of enchanted steed. Not just any animal would do. The wizard found himself in many deadly battles, and he needed a mount that could stand up to a little fire and brimstone type of damage. While traveling the outer planes, Vocater thought a nightmare steed would be just the thing. Consulting with archons and devas, he was able to find a nesting site on a side plane, and he tamed a very likely

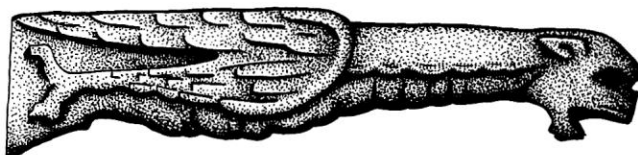
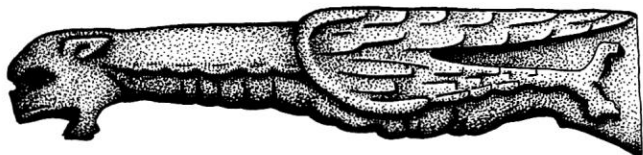
stallion and placed it in the same silver bar as the great fire elemental.

When everything was checked off his list, Vocater went back to the dwarf. The two had a heated discussion (pun intended) once the dwarf learned what the celestial wanted to add to his knife. For another 500,000 in gold, the dwarf agreed to help, and in just a few short days the knife was finished and ready for use. All of the magical components were added, and Vocater found it a thing of beauty. It was no greatsword, to be sure, but the wizard hadn't wanted a greatsword. Each facet of the blade was carefully checked, and all of the components worked perfectly. He briefly thought about increasing the magical combat enhancements of the blade, but that would have taken another light of seven moons, and he didn't want to take the time. He judged the knife perfect, and he placed it in an ebony case and set two pale-green prism ioun stones on either side of the blade. These were Ren's favorite among the ioun stones, and the wizard was constantly burning those stones out. Vocater liked giving his wizard friend ioun stones and took every opportunity to present him with new ones.

The next day dawned bright and clear in the city of Dragonkind. Almost as an afterthought, Vocater presented the knife to Ren and asked him if he would need help figuring out its powers. The wizard, a little miffed that his celestial assistant would think he needed help, said no. He just wanted to know the command word to activate the item. After hearing that, he sent his assistant away and began to play with his new toy. With a wave of his hand, he activated the blade. Instantly, a nightmare appeared on his left, activating 20 alarms against outsider intrusion. On his right, a fire elemental appeared, causing several hundred defensive spells to go off at once. If that wasn't enough, a huge explosion of dragon fire blew out the entire left side of Ren's castle. The sound of the explosion, and the resulting blaze and smoke, could be heard and seen 30 miles away.

"Vocater!" Ren shouted, as he saw a good portion of his castle burning all around him.

The celestial turned from what he was doing in a distant part of the castle. He'd heard the explosion, of course, but explosions were almost commonplace in this castle. He'd never quite heard that tone of voice from Ren, however. He was also amazed that the sound of his wizard's voice came through so clearly, past the many walls of the castle. The Ghaele hoped it was because Ren was really happy with his new knife. It had been a bit of a task to create that blade. He got up and walked to the ruined other side of the castle to receive his well-deserved congratulations.



Sorcerer Atum-Sept's Knife

In ancient times, the sorcerer Atum-Sept was a powerful and evil man. With thousands of slaves to answer his every command, he managed to create a minor kingdom within the large empire of his pharaoh's lands. He helped develop a small city, and it was his devotion to all the gods that caused him to create a huge row of temples to the greatest of the Egyptian gods. His fame and reach affected many other kingdoms, and one day, at the height of his power, a jealous king from another land sent a deadly assassin who imprisoned him in a magical blade.

Atum-Sept found himself alive and aware in a magical prison of 10 steps by 20 steps that he could not teleport out of or use interplanar magics to escape from. He knew these life-trapping devices from his own experiments and knew himself to be doomed unless chance might release him. Never aging, never needing to sleep or eat, Atum-Sept prayed to the gods for release

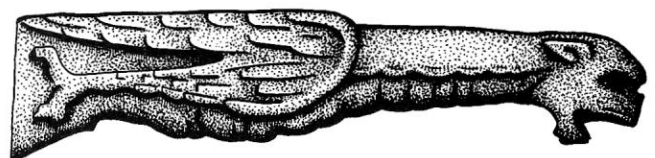
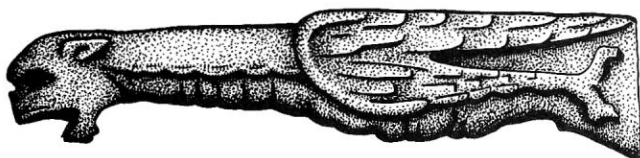
and managed to grow even stronger in power while imprisoned. In the first hundred years, he prayed to the god Ra and taught himself new verbal spells. As he was an evil man, Ra heard him, but the god rejected the wizard's plea, as he thought meditation might change Atum-Sept's evil ways. In the second hundred years, Atum-Sept exercised his body and taught himself unarmed combat

skills. Magically, he was able to keep track of time, although that ability soon became a curse as the years rolled by. His prayers switched to Bast, the goddess of cats and cleverness, but they went unanswered. For the next two hundred years, he continued his physical disciplines and prayed to Bes, the god of luck, figuring luck was the only thing that could save him. Bes never answered him, however, and Atum-Sept grew grim indeed. For the next six hundred years, he meditated in the lotus position and prayed to the god Set. His heart turned cold, his skin darkened, and blood flowed from his eyes like tears. The god Set recognized the great usefulness of Atum-Sept as a tool to build his own power. With a simple thought, Set put in motion the conditions

to free his new worshiper.

One day, an incautious assassin placed one too many souls in the magical dagger he was given by his guild master. The weapon had performed wonderfully for over a thousand years. There was no reason to think it wouldn't continue to magically function. However, the unmagical assassins hadn't taken the time to study their

ancient magical artifacts. Atum-Sept popped out of his magical prison and reached into the heart of the assassin to pull it out, still beating, killing him instantly. Screaming at the top of his voice in elation, Atum-Sept shouted, "This is only my first sacrifice to you, great Set. May I live to give you one heart for every day I spent in that accursed prison."



The wizard found himself in the well-appointed chambers of a rich and great lord of new Egypt. For the rest of the night, he read through the scrolls of the noble, whose soul even now rested in the enchanted blade of the dagger. The language of the ancients was vastly different than the new text, but that's what magic was for, and Atum-Sept was a master spell caster. Atum-Sept would keep the blade that imprisoned him as a prized possession and a reminder of where he had spent 1,000 years of his life.

At first, the great sorcerer tried to blend in with the people, but he was too different, and life had changed much in the thousand years he had been gone. Used to being treated as a lord, he was nothing but a spell caster in this world. It was difficult to hide his nature; every time he cast a spell, blood would flow from his eyes. He had to learn the language of his people all over again, and his ancient mannerisms marked him as strange. He tried setting himself up in the rich quarter of the city, but the existing lords of the city constantly hounded him. They didn't know what to make of this powerful spell caster. All they knew was that he was a worshiper of Set and had dangerous powers. Soon wizards, clerics, and city watch fighters were all moving against him. He killed many of them out of hand, and each time he gave the beating heart to Set and the body turned to dust. There were too many of them to fight, however. Atum-Sept left the city and was magically drawn back to the city of his youth.

Charenldi was a ruined city now, almost totally buried under the sands of the desert. In the thousand years that Atum-Sept had been gone, the Nile changed its course, leaving his beloved city of canals and gardens nothing but a memory.

He shed real tears for the time he'd lost and what had happened to his city. Using his magics, he began to rebuild Charenldi. Air elementals and wind spirits gently moved the sand away from the temples and palaces of his city. Earth elementals and the long-dead architects were raised to rebuild the stone columns and restore the lost beauty of the city. Working for a hundred years in the middle of the vast desert, Atum-Sept restored the glory of his city and populated it with the dead who lay sleeping under the sands.

In a rare display of kindness, he released the other 10 souls imprisoned in the knife blade. One by one, he allowed them to realize where and when they were. He gave them the choice of living with him and worshipping Set or going back to their homelands and starting their lives over there. All 10 people left, but they came back within the year with haunted looks in their eyes. Time had erased their contacts and families.

Atum-Sept knew he needed to work on presenting

souls to Set. The god had let him know that there was a huge debt to pay. Atum-Sept was evil, but he didn't really want to begin taking the lives of the people of Egypt. He loved his land and people. Then war came to the land, and the sorcerer had his answer in the form of thousands of invaders coming out of the East on wheeled carts, moving at lightning speed. Atum-Sept smiled for the first time in several hundred years.

Scouts from the invading army observed a city filled with lights. It appeared as a rich fruit to be plucked. They made their reports to their leaders, and the army's direction was turned slightly; the city knew invaders for the first time in its existence. The chariots of the foreign warriors thundered through the streets of the city unopposed. The entire 10,000-man army raced to the heart of the palace. They encountered no people, but found great beauty and riches in every mansion. There, in the king's chamber, sat Atum-Sept. Behind him, the idol of Set gleamed with magical energy.

A hundred warriors raced into the empty chamber to discover the sorcerer waiting for them. As they raised their weapons to attack, five invisible skeletons appeared before and behind each man and chopped him to pieces. The living hearts were placed on Set's altar, and the bodies turned to dust. In an instant, formerly invisible skeletons and zombies appeared all around the invading army. The monsters were cut down by the thousands, only to be replaced by double that number coming out of the sands of the land beyond the city limits. In one day, the entire invading army was turned to dust, and Set greatly increased in spiritual power.

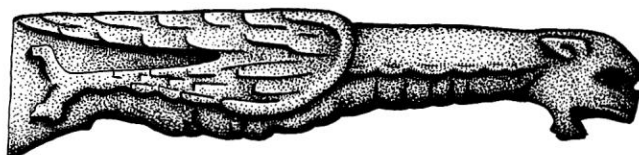
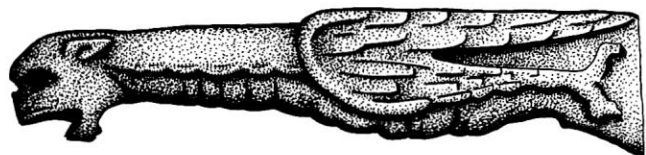
Atum-Sept bowed on hand and knee to his great deity. He knew he'd done well that day, and his sacrifices were appreciated. His knife held the general-prince of the army. He didn't quite know how best to use the leader. There were many ways to please Set, and Atum-Sept was learning more of them.

It was during the dark of the moon, one year later, that he released the general and severed the man's small finger from his hand. A team of skeletal horses pulled a chariot up to the general.

"I destroyed your army. I find you and your people weak. Come back with a larger army if you want your finger back."

Atum-Sept's laughter was all the general heard as he raced the frightening team of monster horses out of the city and into the night. Somehow he doubted he'd ever be back.

In the enchanted spell-casting room of the palace, the sorcerer cast the first of the dream spells that would bring the fool back or drive him insane. Either way, the sorcerer knew his god would be happy with the result.



Naugda, Dagger of Raa'Paar

For most humans, the mere mention of the underground race known as the dark elves brings a shudder. The name conjures images of damp, filthy caves, malnourished elves living in squalor, smoky passages, and communities of dark-skinned elves who wait for the chance to bring death and mayhem to the surface-dwellers.

The dark elves are, however, an intelligent, well ordered race that rivals the civility of humans and surface elves. Their communities are clean, their children are schooled, and their craftsmen are talented and meticulous. They are capable of great feats of technology and magic, and their history is long and rich. From the pages of dark elf history comes to light a tale of an enchanted blade, a cunning theft, and an unparalleled corruption.

Perhaps a thousand years distant in the past, in an expansive realm of dark elves, a talented smith named Raa'Paar set forth to craft a weapon that would gain him fame and notoriety throughout the ages. He spent many months designing the ideal dagger, discarding numerous sketches and models. Finally, he hit upon a design that stirred his heart—a dagger with a tapering blade, a stocky hilt, and a leering, monstrous face between the quillions. It would be sturdy yet lightweight, perfectly balanced, and extremely deadly. By his adding several enchantments, it would be a sought-after weapon that would bring fame (and an endless stream of orders) to Raa'Paar and his family. The smith spent several months fashioning the blade and another half a year imbuing it with enchantments. By the time he was finished, many dark elves in his community were interested in the dagger. Raa'Paar had no choice but to auction the blade to the highest bidder, and the winner was a high-level member of the assassins' guild.

Raa'Paar instructed the buyer in the use of the dagger and its enchantments. The weapon allowed its owner to move silently and invisibly, and it could warn its wielder of certain dangers. And Raa'Paar had built a safeguard into the magics: Any creature with human blood who tried to use the dagger would suffer terrible mishaps at crucial moments, especially when trying to strike a killing blow. The assassin practiced repeatedly with the dagger, then went about his business.

Roughly two months later, the furious assassin stormed into Raa'Paar's shop. He threw down the dagger and accused the smith of being a braggart and a cheat. The assassin had been hired for a critical mission in the overworld, and at a pivotal moment, the dagger throbbed and jiggled in his hand like a squirming fish. He had nearly been killed, had missed his mark, and had suffered a

giant gash across his back in his retreat.

The assassin snatched the dagger off the floor and swung it at Raa'Paar in anger, missing him by a great margin as the weapon wriggled in his hand. Raa'Paar could only stare, dumbfounded. He had barely choked a phrase at the assassin before he was lifted to his feet and thrown across the room. Raa'Paar's assistant arrived to intervene, but the assassin's hands closed around the smith's throat. "Human," he managed to croak. The assassin dropped him and fell back in horror. Raa'Paar recovered himself and gurgled his explanation: "Happens...if it's held...by someone with human blood."

The assassin screamed in rage as the meaning of the words sank in. He had been raised in this realm of dark elves, by dark elf parents, and with dark elf grandparents, but somehow...somewhere in his bloodline lurked a human. Revulsion gripped the assassin, and he grasped for the nearest blade in Raa'Paar's shop. Determined to keep this dreadful news a secret, he slit the smith's throat and followed up by killing his assistant.

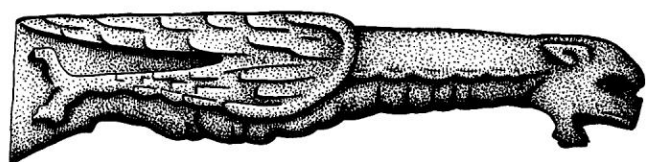
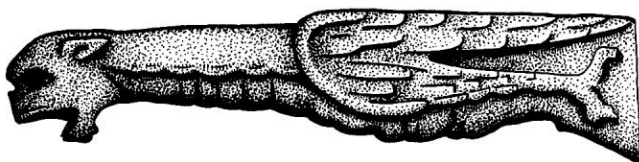
The assassin gathered his wits and stumbled from the shop. Several dark elves had gathered nearby upon hearing the commotion. The assassin publicly announced that Raa'Paar was dead, and deservedly so—the famed dagger that the smith had bragged about was suited for nothing better than peeling turnips. He told the tale of his spoiled job and his damaged reputation, and all present agreed that the assassin was justified in his actions. The dagger might have gotten him killed—the smith and his assistant deserved the fate they had been dealt. Raa'Paar, unfortunately, gained the notoriety he had sought.

The assassin announced that he would take the weapon home and lock it away, lest anyone else suffer the consequences of its terrible make. He silently wished that it never be touched by any other dark elf, for he now had a foul secret to protect.

In the dim underground streets of the underworld, a young thief named Simone and her master watched the commotion from a shadowed niche. The youth was ready for a test, and her master decided that opportunity had just knocked.

Simone spent the next several days studying the assassin's home. She examined the doors, windows, and chimney, and carefully noted the dark elf's comings and goings. She peered through windows to try to determine where the dagger might be hidden. At last, a few days later, the assassin left his home for a night of gambling, and she slipped into the house to steal the weapon.

The young thief quickly checked cabinets, chests, mattresses, and other hiding places. She believed she knew which room held the dagger, and the assassin had said that he would "lock it up." After nearly half an hour of searching, Simone found her prize. She picked the lock to



a large wall cabinet and there, in the farthest corner, she found the dagger. She hid it in a pocket, relocked the cabinet, and slipped out of the house.

Many years later, Simone joined an adventuring group that sought out a black dragon living in a swampy cove. The entire party was destroyed in less than an hour, and the dagger that was to have brought fame to Raa'Paar sank to the bottom of the muck in the dragon's cove.

Raa'Paar's dagger lay at the bottom of the cave for close to a century, soaking up the magical emanations of the dragon. Already a creation of evil, the dagger served as a magnet for the evil powers of the wyrm.

The spring rains arrived one year in the form of torrential storms. Farms and valleys flooded, fields were all but destroyed, and residents of the locale feared that the end of the world had come.

The black dragon's cave flooded to the halfway mark, with waters swirling through the cave for weeks. Although the dragon hardly noticed, the receding waters took away a number of his treasures, including Raa'Paar's dagger.

The weapon was bounced and dragged out of the cave and into a deep, narrow stream. The stream joined with a gentle river, and at the bend where the two met, the dagger lodged against a boulder. There it lay until the end of

summer, when heat and drought reduced the river to a trickle.

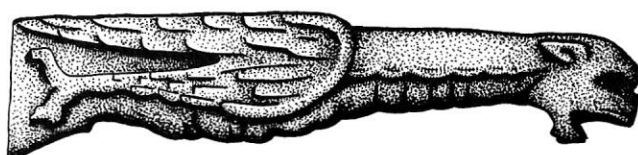
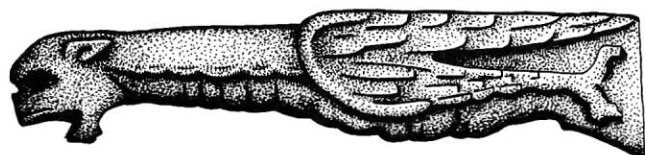
The swamplands and wilds that surrounded this stretch of the river made poor farmland, so a number of wilder folk—hill giants, gnomes, and brownies—made their homes nearby. So it happened one day that a hill giant named Gruenab visited the river in search of water. He had just managed to fill his bucket and his belly when he

spied the dagger lying in the mud. Slipping it free, he admired its design and the beautiful, smooth metal. But something about it gave him a sense of dread. Brushing aside the strange feeling, he took the dagger home with the intent of finding a good use for it.

Gruenab was ambushed by brownies on the way home for nothing more than his bucket of water. He lashed out with the dagger and a strange tingling laced up

his arm. The brownies seemed to notice something fearful, for as Gruenab stared at the weapon and rubbed his arm vigorously, the brownies fled in terror. The hill giant was reluctant to throw away such a lovely piece, so kept the weapon anyway.

Gruenab still keeps the weapon in his tool shed. Although he dislikes the strange effects it reveals in a fight, he finds that it makes a dandy tool for digging potatoes and rutabagas every autumn.



Archibald's Dagger of Water and Air

At the edge of a tranquil sea rises a rocky island that was once an active volcano. For over a millennium, the volcano has been quiet, leaving the island to flourish with plant and animal life. Exotic birds chatter in fig and coconut trees, monkeys swing from vines in search of fruit to snack on, and rare flowers of every color accent the island's greenery. This island, known as Padaquay, would be a perfect spot for many things—but an unexpected place for a wizard to make his home. But that is precisely what Padaquay is known for—it was once the home of an unusual wizard named Archibald.

Archibald discovered this island during his early years as a mage. Having just perfected the art of flying, the neophyte determined to test his new skill to its limits. Instead of flying safely over familiar terrain, however, the bold young wizard pointed himself at a speck on

the ocean and set out toward it. His journey was exhilarating, and Archibald tested his skills, flying low over a school of dolphins and flying as high as he could before the air became somewhat thin and hard to breathe. Just as he felt his experiment was a complete success, he caught sight of an island in the distance. Here was an interesting side trip! Archibald increased his speed and aimed directly for the island.

Disregarding the time and distance he had traveled, the

young mage had no idea that his spell was about to give out. About five hundred yards from the island, though, Archibald became aware that he was slowing down and losing altitude. Sure enough, his spell had failed, and the ocean was drawing near at a terrific pace. Bracing himself for the plunge, Archibald splashed into the warm sea and barely managed to right himself. His woolen clothing was drenched and dragged him down, but the wizard managed to swim to the island he had seen from the sky. Reaching the sandy beach, he peeled off his soaked clothing and spread it out to dry, flopping himself on the sand to catch his breath. He was stuck on the island for the night, until he could refresh his flying spell the next morning.

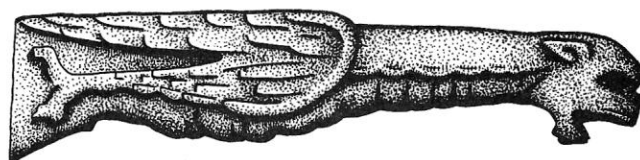
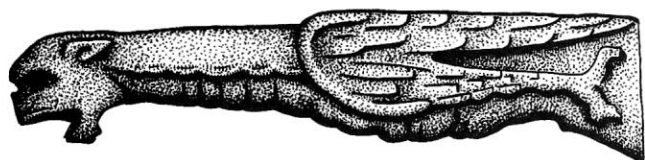
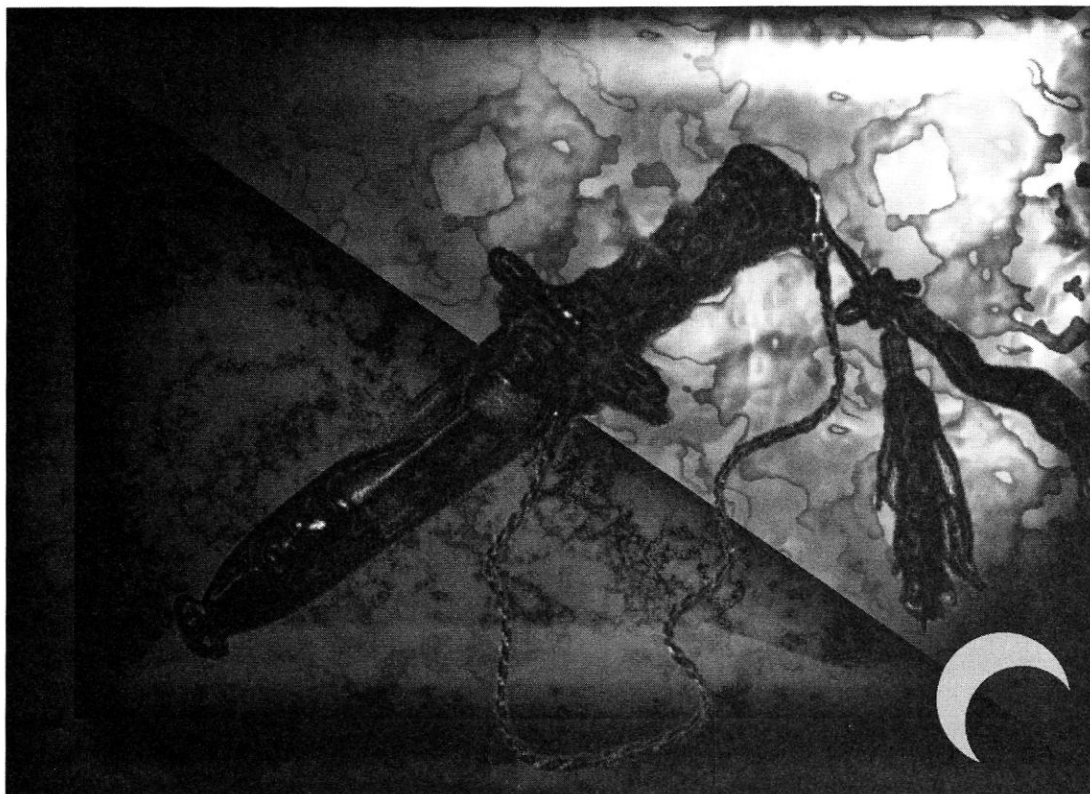
The young wizard probably fell asleep, for he suffered a

nasty sunburn that day, but when he recounted his story to his friends, he swore that he was awakened by beautiful, tinkling music. His friends and teachers dismissed it as exhaustion and heatstroke, but Archibald insisted he had heard an unusual tune.

As soon as he had recovered, Archibald

again set out for the island. Gauging his direction, speed, and altitude carefully this time, the young wizard reached the island safely and set himself down on the beach. He began exploring, covering new ground that he missed on his first trip. He camped for the night, then refreshed his flying spell and toured the island by air. He found no one living on the island after many hours of searching. He again camped, deciding to return home the next day.

In the middle of the night, Archibald was awakened by



the same music he had heard before. Sitting up, he listened carefully. The music seemed to come from the water. He looked out and saw several young women playing in the surf. They must be strong swimmers, he thought to himself, to be playing so far from the beach. He watched for several minutes, and when the moon drifted from behind the clouds, Archibald caught sight of one of the women. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Her hair reflected blue in the moonlit waves and her green eyes sparkled like gems. She laughed, and at once the mage knew that this was the music he had heard. Then all at once, the girl and her friends disappeared into the sea.

When Archibald returned home the next day, his friends were convinced that he had been dreaming. But the wizard could not get the beautiful girl out of his thoughts. He studied some spells that would let him breathe underwater, and at the first chance, Archibald again flew to the island to look for the girl. He waited on the beach until well after dark, cast his spell, and swam out to where he had seen the young women playing. He searched until his spell quit and his limbs ached, and returned to the beach to rest. As he lay in the moonlight staring up at the stars, the familiar music reached him again. There, not twenty yards out, swam the girl he had seen before. She beckoned to him, and Archibald dove into the surf. The girl waited for him, and as soon as the young mage reached her, he learned the truth: above the water, she was a beautiful young woman, but below the water, she had no legs, but a long, graceful tail.

Within a week, Archibald had moved all his belongings to the island the mermaid had called Padaquay. He built a small hut and spent most of his time with the lovely mermaid, who called herself Silsay. And he turned all of his studies of magic toward manipulations of water and air. He returned to his former home frequently for supplies, lessons, and advice, but for all purposes, the island was his new home.

Archibald was not heard from for several years, then one day appeared at the home of his former mentor. The mage was lean and tanned from his life on the island. He shared many magical discoveries with his former teacher and his friends. And he asked their advice in locating a craftsman who could fashion a special dagger for him to enchant.

The wizard visited several artisans and selected one whose work was exceptional. He left specific instructions for the design of his dagger, then returned to his island home.

A few months later, Archibald returned for the weapon he had requested. The dagger was exceptional. The blade, hilt, and sheath were all crafted of blue and white streaked marble. It had accents of gold and platinum,

with some tiny gems set into the sheath. Archibald paid for the dagger with old, foreign coins and went on his way.

A year later, Archibald returned again to visit his friends and former teachers. He had finished his work on the dagger and was eager to demonstrate its abilities. His friends were skeptical, believing that his isolated lifestyle could not have allowed him to expand his magical talent sufficiently to succeed at what he claimed. But his friends good-naturedly followed him to the beach and tested Archibald's dagger.

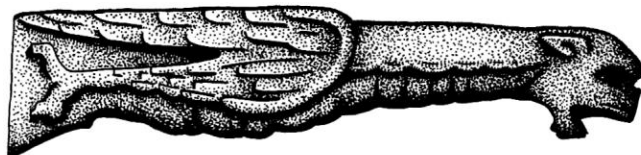
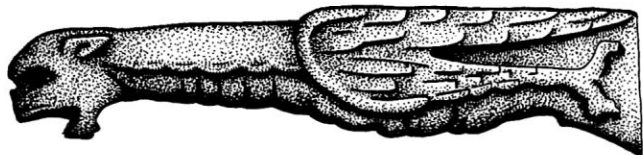
Archibald's closest friend, Korlin, followed the mage into the sea and took the dagger. Korlin immediately realized that he could breathe water as easily as air. He also discovered that he could move through the water swiftly, as easily as walking on land. Archibald took out a small knife and signaled his friend to spar with him. To Korlin's great surprise, fighting with Archibald's dagger was also as easy as fighting on dry land.

Archibald swam to his friend and placed his hand on the dagger's sheath. Instantly, Korlin could hear his thoughts and communicate with his friend. Korlin also soon discovered that he could communicate with the creatures of the sea.

The wizard's friends were impressed with his talents. They asked him dozens of questions about his life on the island. Archibald claimed that some new friends had taught him the ways of water magic, and invited his comrades to visit his island.

A week later, Korlin and the others found their way to Padaquay. They toured the exquisite island and marveled at the home and laboratory Archibald had built. But they found no sign of any other humans on the island, and found themselves wondering about the mysterious friends the mage had mentioned. A few days later, they returned home, happy for their friend but puzzled about his strange lifestyle.

Archibald was happy for his friends' visit, but was more convinced than ever that he had chosen wisely in moving to the island. After bidding his friends farewell, he took his enchanted dagger and waded into the water. Speaking a word of command, he slipped into the waves and felt his legs merge into an enormous tail. He swam a familiar route to the bottom of the sea, where he entered a coral reef and made his way to a beautiful underwater village. Swimming easily among structures made of shells and coral, he reached an expansive home, entered, and kissed his blue-haired wife. Their three children gathered around to greet their father. Archibald lay his dagger in a protective niche of coral, and sat down to tell his family of his adventures.



Adder's Fang

Deciphered from the coded journals of Jevan the Calm, master thief:

Third week of Areta, Year of Rushing Rivers—A new rival has arrived in town, and frankly I must admit that she is good enough to challenge my dominance of the guild if I'm not careful. As usual, however, I've got a secret weapon. She calls herself Jade Adder, which I happen to think is a ridiculous name, especially since, unlike the rest of the guild (except maybe the master), I know her real name. I didn't recognize her at first—after all, it's been many years and many miles—but when I last saw Jade (as I'll call her in these journals—I just can't write that silly name over and over), she was called Alena, and she was working as a whore in Nagel. I'm sure I can use that little bit of knowledge to my advantage, should it ever become necessary.

In any case, Jade has definitely polished her skills since then—just seeing her move told me that much. She's fluid and graceful, like a hunting cat—reminds me of me, actually. A quick look at her eyes when she was formally inducted into the guild told me the most important thing about her, though—she has definitely killed in cold blood before. She may give me competition both in the guild and as a freelance assassin—looks like my dominance of this city might be over. Right, like I'm gonna let that happen. Still, she definitely bears watching...

First week of Obed, Year of Rushing Rivers—All joking aside, I find I must now admit to myself that Jade truly is a worthy rival. The past several months since she arrived have seen her reputation grow rapidly among the bumbling pinchpurses and mindless thugs who make up the rest of the guild—I daresay she is possibly as respected a thief as I am. Regardless, I still get first pick of the jobs the guildmaster sometimes offers, those "special" ones that are always so lucrative, so I know I bring in more gold than Jade. I'm fairly sure she hasn't taken any work killing anyone yet either, so I still have that end of business nailed down. Still, my instincts tell me it's just a matter of time....

Fourth week of Raban, Year of Rushing Rivers—I hate the rainy season. It makes it more difficult to work, not to mention being downright uncomfortable. Plus, I hate getting my fur wet—stinks for days. Times like these, I ask myself why I became a thief. Self, I answer, it's because of the fabulous wealth, the exciting work, and because growing wheat is for suckers. Can't believe I forgot that—if I wasn't stealing or murdering, I'd have to do honest work. That, or become an adventurer. Those people work even less than I do.

If Jade keeps going the way she has, becoming an

adventurer may not be such a bad idea. She's started building a name for herself as a killer for hire now. Nothing for me to lose sleep over just yet, just small jobs, but that's where it starts. At least, that's where it started for me, and I see no reason that she'd be any different. I'm also pretty sure she has figured out that I'm keeping an eye on her—she as much as told me so—but it doesn't seem to bother her. She really needs to lighten up, I think. For an assassin, she has no sense of humor.

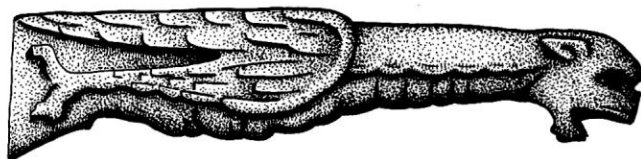
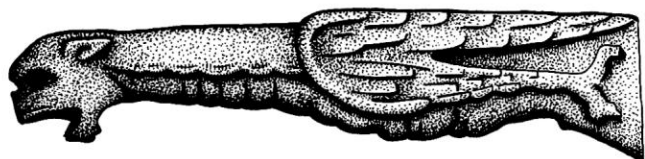
Third week of Eudo, Year of Rushing Rivers—Winter. I like snow about as much as rain. Jade seems to take offense at my attitude—she told me yesterday that I set a bad example for the other guild members. I mean, really—what a ridiculous statement. I steal things and kill people for money. If she wants a role model, Jade can contact a cleric. I'd be offended if it wasn't so damn ridiculous.

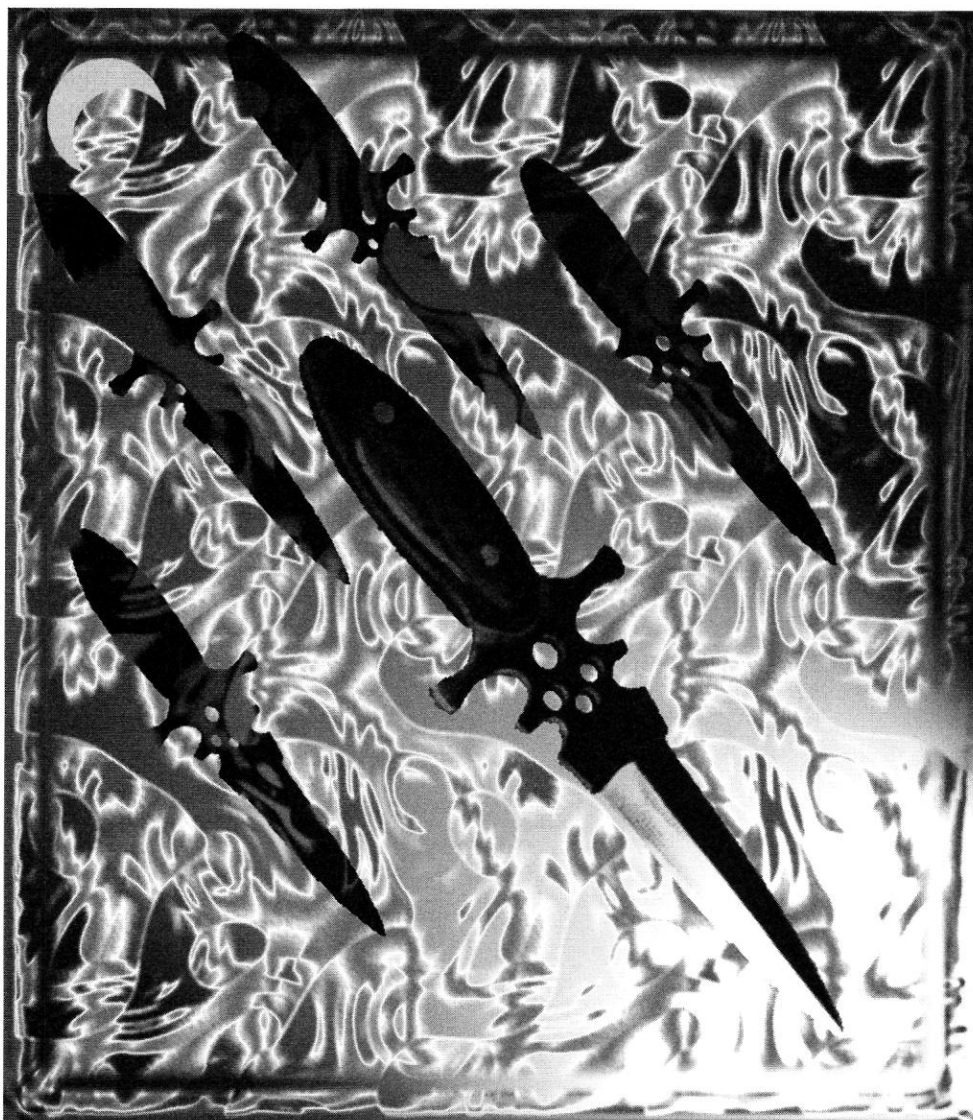
Jade has acquired a new toy—a magical dagger. Interestingly enough, research has shown it has a connection to me. The story is actually quite intriguing, as it involves my grandfather and his rival. Seems about two hundred years or so ago, grandpappy ran the guild here. He was a full-blooded drow, and pretty talented, too, from what I hear. Worked both sides of the fence, like me—thief and murder. Anyway, his rival was the guy he beat out for the guildmaster job—wizard by the name of Vilhelm. Vilhelm used his magic to steal and kill. That's sort of cheating, to my way of thinking, not that I wouldn't do it that way if I could. Nothing wrong with cheating, so long as nobody catches you at it.

Vilhelm and grandpa went after each other in the shadows for years, sabotaging each other's jobs, stealing work from each other, that type of thing. Eventually, Vilhelm got tired of it. He decided to get rid of grandpa once and for all, but didn't think he was ready just yet. He figured what he needed was a tool, custom-made for the job. I would have just gotten an arrow made to slay drow, but Vilhelm seems to have lacked imagination. He decided instead to enchant his favorite murderin' dagger to augment his abilities.

So Vilhelm disappeared for a couple months, off making his new dagger. When he came back, he looked like hell—you could tell he'd been hurling dark magics and whatnot the whole time—but the dagger was done. It let him move more quietly and slink around in the shadows much more easily, made it so he didn't need sleep anymore, and even made it easier to land a kill shot. The worst part, though, is that old Vilhelm gave the thing intelligence and made killing drow the foremost thing in its little magical mind. That is just plain rude.

With his new friend in hand, Vilhelm snuck into grandpa's room one night to kill him. Of course, as an elf, grandpa wasn't sleeping, just in trance, so he wasn't really surprised. The two fought, and they managed to kill





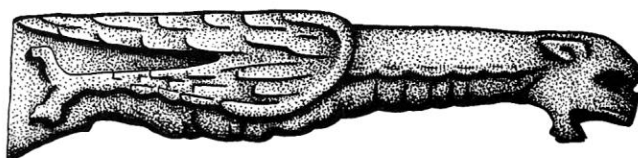
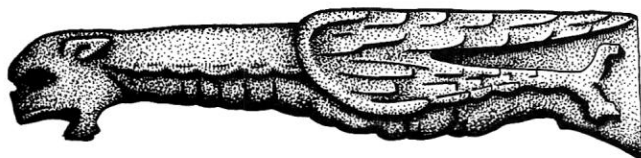
each other. (That sounds so trite and boring, but what can I do—I'm not a bard.) The dagger disappeared and hasn't been seen until now. I've got a feeling I'd better prepare myself for a fight—I'm sure Jade's just itching to jam that thing in my eye. I don't know if it wants to kill half-drow, but I'm not betting my life on it.

First week of Areta, Year of White Gold—Well, Jade is officially trying to kill me. She's been quite careful, working through other people and the like, but I know it's her. I don't think she knows I'm a lycanthrope—her people have been shooting me with normal arrows and stabbing me with normal swords. Either she doesn't know, or she is giving me one hell of a warning shot. Of course, if she comes after me with that Adder's Fang thing (that's what everyone calls her magic dagger), my shape-changing heritage won't save me. The magic in that thing will kill me but good. More and more, getting the hell out of here is starting to look good—but I'm feeling some sort of silly

need to avenge grandpa or something. I have a feeling that's gonna get me killed, too, but I can't help it. I'm not sure if this is family loyalty I'm feeling, or if I just really hate Jade. Both, maybe.

Second week of Obed, Year of White Gold—I think I won. Jade attacked, I was ready, we fought—but this time around, neither killer died. She took off when the fight turned against her, and I can't find her. Nobody seems to be able to locate her, with magic or anything else. So winning just means I get to run around being paranoid until she tries again and I can finally kill her. Either that, or I assume she gave up and she sneaks into my room some night and sticks Adder's Fang in my eye. The choices just don't excite me, I must admit.

I did finally get revenge on Vilhelm for grandpappy, though—I had his remains found and dug up, and a craftsman I know made a nice pot out of him. I know just the thing to use it for, too....



Duchess' Dagger

"Okay, everyone please continue this way. This way, everyone. That's it, please stay together and gather around this glass case," Harvey, the museum guide, ushered the day's last tour group into the dimly lit chamber that contained just a single glass case on a stone pedestal. "Please gather around here and we can continue." Old ladies and snotty kids again, Harvey ground his teeth hard and steeled himself to finish and clock out.

"This particular specimen is a perfect example of incidental enchantment. It is the Duchess' Dagger, used by the ..."

"What's incidental enchantment?" It was that red-haired brat again, the one with the squeaky voice and expensive clothes.

"Well, if you had been listening earlier you would know that incidental enchantment means the object took on magical properties as the result of a single emotionally powerful incident." Take that, little bastard.

"I knew that," he squeaked. "I just wanted to see if you remembered."

"Fine." Twerp. "Now, if we can continue without the interruptions ... As I was saying, this is the famous Duchess' Dagger, used in the suicide of Andalea, Duchess of Witherspoon in 1063."

"Are you sure that was 1063?"

"Quite sure."

"I thought it was 1094." A couple of the little thug's friends tittered, but Harvey maintained.

"No, it was 1063. Moving on, then. The beautiful Andalea discovered all in one day that her beloved husband was a traitor to the crown and to their own bed, so she pulled out this dagger and plunged it deep into her own heart." Harvey motioned toward the glass-encased dagger, glowing softly of its own light. The little old ladies drew close to see. The unruly teens chuckled at some unheard joke, no doubt at his expense. Smarmy little bastards.

"You have something to add, perhaps?" he asked of them.

"No, Harvey, you seem to be doing just fine." Damn name badges. Harvey secretly decided to 'lose' his again

after today.

"The Duchess died that evening," he continued, "despite all magical efforts to revive her. Her handmaidens recovered the dagger and its enchantment was not immediately recognized. They stored it in a trunk with her other valuables where it stayed for nearly 100 years before discovery." The punks had taken to mocking the old ladies in the group for a bit, turning their attention temporarily away from Harvey. What a bunch of little jerks.

"A routine magic security sweep of the building revealed the dagger's enchantment and it was added to the household's arsenal. When the Duchy of Witherspoon went on hard times in the 1400s the museum acquired the

Duchess' Dagger for 40,000 gold.

That's when ... Now listen, you little bastards. Why don't you just shut the hell up back there!" Did I just say that? Was that my voice? So deep, so loud.

"What did you say?" one of the old ladies asked, but the others and the young thugs were all stone silent, even backing slowly away. Did it just get hotter in here? Harvey pulled at his collar and cleared his throat.

"You can't talk to us that way!" the red-haired punk finally spoke up.

"Like hell I can't! Straighten up and shut your fat heads or I'll cut your ignorant throats!" There, it happened again. Harvey's head spun. Why was he saying these things? He really liked saying them, but it wasn't like him at all.

"You'll ... what?" Little red-head had turned quite pale, and his fellows had retreated out of the chamber entirely. Harvey darted forward and grabbed the punk by the collar and pulled him in eye to eye.

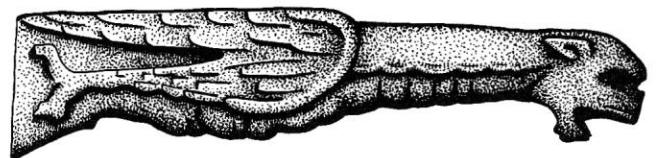
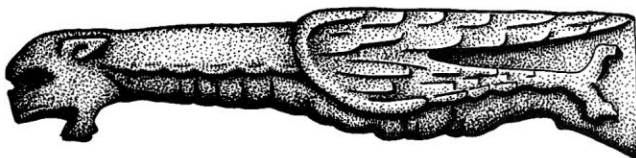
"I said, I'll cut your miserable throat from ear to ear!" he growled. Not his voice, but certainly his sentiment. Man, that felt good!

But red-hair stiffened, saying,

"Actually, Harvey, my daddy owns this museum and I think I'll just have him fire you!"

Calmly, Harvey pulled out his flashlight and, using the butt end, smashed the glass over the magical dagger and pulled it out, shards and all, to press it's cold blade against the twerp's white throat.

"Or not."



Thief's Knife

Tannon Oldfelder was a weaponsmith all his life. He loved crafting weapons, and he was very good at it. Later in his life, the gods gifted him with the ability to enchant weapons. This training he received from grateful dwarves whom he had supplied over the years with fine steel that they couldn't make themselves. Tannon had several sons, and they all grew into strapping young men. None of them wanted to follow in their father's footsteps, however, and all became warriors in the surrounding kingdoms. Tannon, being a loving father, made sure they had the best in weapons and dwarven-made armor, and his sons became famous in their lands as brave and skillful fighters.

Arron Oldfelder was the youngest of the sons and a famous archer in his land, which bordered a kingdom of the elves. Arron had gained much of his knowledge of archery from the friendly elves that liked teaching the human their craft. Unfortunately for Arron, the fortunes of war were not kind to him, and in a night battle he was wounded in one of his eyes and was forced to wear a patch for the rest of his life. The young man went home to his father to heal. He sat in his bed for a week, dispirited, before his father thought it was time to raise his son out of his funk. With only one eye, archery was out of the question, as any potential target had to be measured by two good eyes to properly judge the distance.

Tannon had a party in his house, and he invited all of his old war buddies. These men were brave fighters in their day, and Tannon had made weapons for each and

every one of them. Longtom came back from the wars without an arm. Redaxe lost a leg in his battle. Johnny Anvil lost the use of his speech as a result of a war whip taking out a chunk of his neck. Soon the small house was filled with jolly men, and all of them were far worse off than Arron was, and the young man figured out what his father was trying to tell him. His spirit rose, and soon he was drinking and trading war stories with all of them. His father smiled, knowing his son was of good stock on his departed mother's side.

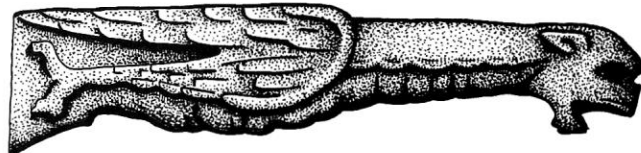
At dawn the next day, father and son got up and began working in the smithy. All of Tannon's sons had brought coal for the forge and laid out the tools and metals needed for the day's work. This time, when young Arron moved to the worktable, he found three wondrous items there. Each one was more wondrous than the last. There before him was a shiny knife, a glowing buckler, and a cloak made out of the most amazing, shimmering material.

"I knew one day that one of my boys would come home not able to work his craft any more," Tannon said. "I forged this knife for that day and traded services for the other two things. I think you will find that even with one eye you will be able to use these tools and do well. I can't have my sons sponging off their dad, now can I?"

Tears welled up in his son's eyes as Arron realized the great gift his father was giving him.

"Thank you father," he said, "for being there for us. I will use these things and praise your name always. You know I would have done that anyway."

The smile on his son's face was all the thanks Tannon needed. He went back to work on a new knife for the next son in trouble and had the pleasure of having Arron help him all day long.



Heartstopper

The hobgoblin Greenwich wasn't a happy monster, and he was determined to do something about it. The creature was a master weapon maker for his clan. His weapons hardly ever broke, and they stayed sharp throughout the cutting off of many heads.

Greenwich really liked making the flails and warhammers the shamans of his race used. Many were the blessings he received for creating quality weapons for his holy clan creatures. Touched in some way by the great god Maglubiyet, this weaponsmith was a master craftsman. The hobgoblin received much praise and gold for his fine works.

Greenwich was unhappy because of what had happened to his twin sons. Twins were very rare in the hobgoblin race. These two grew up strong and became great warriors of the clan. That was the problem, however, as they became too famous. Their weapons were the envy of all who saw them. The swords the twins used were enchanted blades, able to cut through any armor. All through history, no hobgoblins had ever had such blades. One day, the clan leader put them at the center of the battle in a fight all the hobgoblins knew they couldn't win. One of the twins was killed, and the other was wounded so badly it would be a very long time before he would fight again, if ever. From the body of the dead twin, the clan leader, Argar, lifted up the magical sword and claimed it as his own. Greenwich on that day became a driven hobgoblin.

Working with the shamans who owed him many favors, he began to create wondrous knives that he had the deity Maglubiyet bless with powers unknown in weapons of the hobgoblins until then. He

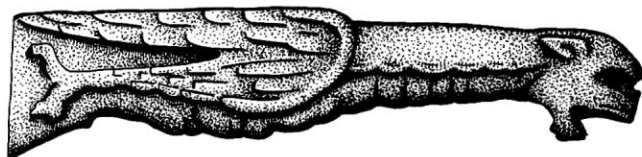
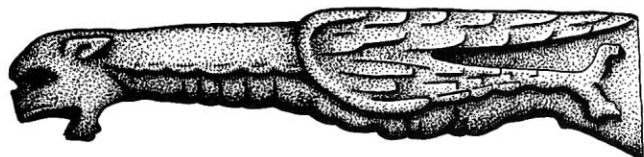
created knives because he knew the spies of Argar would be watching to see how he would react to the taking of the twin's weapon. Knives were seen as puny things among the hobgoblins. Greenwich was going to change that opinion with a few new twists to the blade maker's art. Each of the knives was made in the dark of the night with several sacrifices to call down the magic of

Maglubiyet. When Greenwich was done with the first one, he handed it to a powerful and young hobgoblin warrior in the bodyguard detail of the chief. Everyone marveled at the weapon and its powers.

Greenwich was ordered to make another for the chief of the clan. He said he would start it immediately but that such weapons took a long time to construct. At the next dark of the moon, he crafted another of the blades and blessed it with sacrifices to please Maglubiyet. This blade he gave to the head of the shamans and just asked that he use the weapon to grow in power.

Always delaying the request of the clan chief, Greenwich made seven of the knives before one of them was used to finally kill the clan chief. It was Greenwich's intention all along for his weapons to exact revenge on the leader responsible for killing his son. He knew the unusual throwing power of the knife would be used in the hands of the powerful fighters to whom he gave the knives, to help them gain leadership of the clan. The eighth blade he made was designed for his recovering son who used the weapon to become feared in the realms of man as the hobgoblins began a 30-year reign of terror still remembered a hundred years later. This blade had an unusual power none of the other seven had: the other blades couldn't strike the user of this blade.

Greenwich grew old, but he lived to see his son become clan chief, and in old age he died with a smile on his lips.



Krummel's Eccentric Dagger

For some wizards, lobbing a ball of fire at a horde of charging goblins is a task that requires the utmost concentration and results in near exhaustion. For others, the same task is as easy as brushing lint from a sleeve. For those in the latter group, magic can be so simple as to become routine—but it can become dangerous as well. These are the mages who repeatedly suffer minor accidents such as setting their hair on fire, turning the cat green, or causing snow to fall in their living room.

One wizard of such legendary powers was named Krummel. Even as a baby, his future as a master of magic was obvious; shortly after he learned to crawl, his parents discovered him one afternoon levitating several feet off the floor. As a toddler, Krummel somehow learned the magic of changing colors; the boy merely pointed at objects and turned the cow to orange and purple, the cheese to pink, and his own hair a brilliant blue. Krummel was enrolled in a school of magic by the time he was six years old.

By the time he was ten, Krummel graduated from his first school. His classmates and fellow graduates were all in their late teens. But Krummel could conjure lightning bolts, fly, use a crystal ball, and brew potions better than any of them. And he usually added a twist to his spells as well: His lightning bolts could sing, he could fly faster than anyone, his crystal ball sent forth rainbow beams of light, and his potions tasted like strawberry cream.

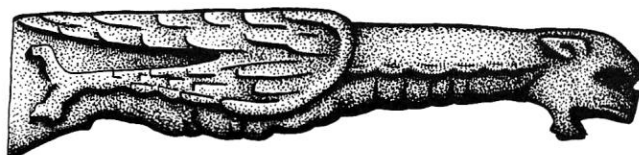
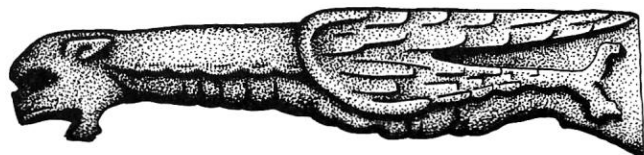
Krummel quickly found an advanced school. While most students studied for six or seven years, Krummel graduated in two years. He had learned to enchant wands, daggers, swords, and rings, he knew how to cast spells from a great distance, and he could cast extremely difficult spells such as wishes. The school was slightly the worse for wear, but Krummel's teachers learned almost as much from him as he did from them.

Krummel decided to build a home and a laboratory, so he found a lovely piece of land amid the rolling hills outside the village where he had grown up. He brewed potions and sold them to the locals, and performed services such as finding lost items. He sometimes was hired to scare away monstrous creatures such as bugbears or hill giants, and he gave advice about the weather. He helped farmers clear rocks from their fields and moved enormous quantities of water in times of drought. Krummel quickly became a favorite among the villagers; he charged little for his services, never grumbled, and entertained them with his command of magic.

The house that Krummel built soon gained a reputation of its own, however. The villagers who called on Krummel never set foot in his house. Word had gotten out that the house was filled with talking pots and pans, a walking broom, lights that turned themselves on and off, and furniture that changed size and color. These bizarre items didn't scare anyone, but after a farmer had his ear yanked by a flying pair of tongs, the villagers thought it safe to avoid Krummel's home.

Krummel lived a long life, and his friends say he counted over 100 birthdays. After his death, he left behind hundreds of enchanted items from the useful to the bizarre to the annoying. One such item of note was a dagger that always hung on a chain near his laboratory table. His friends have guessed that over the years, it must have absorbed a number of spells being cast on other

objects. Before he died, Krummel gave the dagger to his apprentice, who is still learning the bizarre features of the weapon. With a frightful, jagged blade, the dagger laughs when used in combat, sings gentle tunes when used at mealtime, sheds light, has a perfect sense of direction, and identifies magic, invisibility, evil creatures, secret doors, and hidden spaces. The dagger even gives advice from time to time, in the unmistakable voice of the wizard Krummel himself.



Daggers of Rhylingvale

Yarns are sometimes told in taverns of a mysterious kingdom hidden high in the Graycloak Mountains, but all who tell these stories and all who listen dismiss them as mere legends or the offspring of excess ale. How surprised they would be to discover that the enchanted kingdom of Rhylingvale actually exists.

High atop the Graycloak Mountains, wedged into a deep, narrow valley, lies the isolated kingdom known as Rhylingvale. This community of perhaps a thousand people has survived for six or seven centuries without notice of the world around it. Rhylingvale is as real as the mountains that encircle it, but its residents are careful to maintain the myth that protects it. Rhylingvale is highly prosperous, highly magical, and, above all — highly paranoid.

The kingdom was founded by a powerful mage and her student followers who were driven from their homes as outlaws. They fled into the mountains as their small school of magic was burned on a winter evening. Rhyling and her small band were never heard from again, leaving their pursuers to believe that the troupe froze to death on that bitter night.

Instead, Rhyling and her companions made their way up the mountain, using magic to protect themselves and letting nature cover their tracks. They reached the valley that Rhyling had discovered years before, and settled a new kingdom devoted to the practice of magic. As the years passed, the colony grew, with every man, woman, and child learning the magical arts. The kingdom never lacked for food or equipment, and this tiny world might have been described as idyllic if not for one glaring flaw: paranoia.

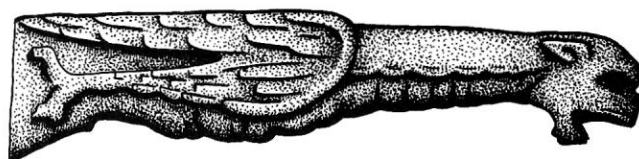
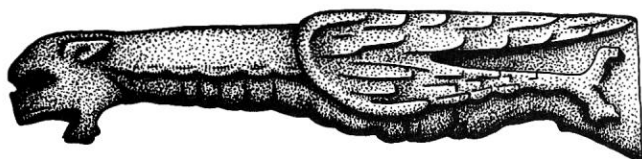
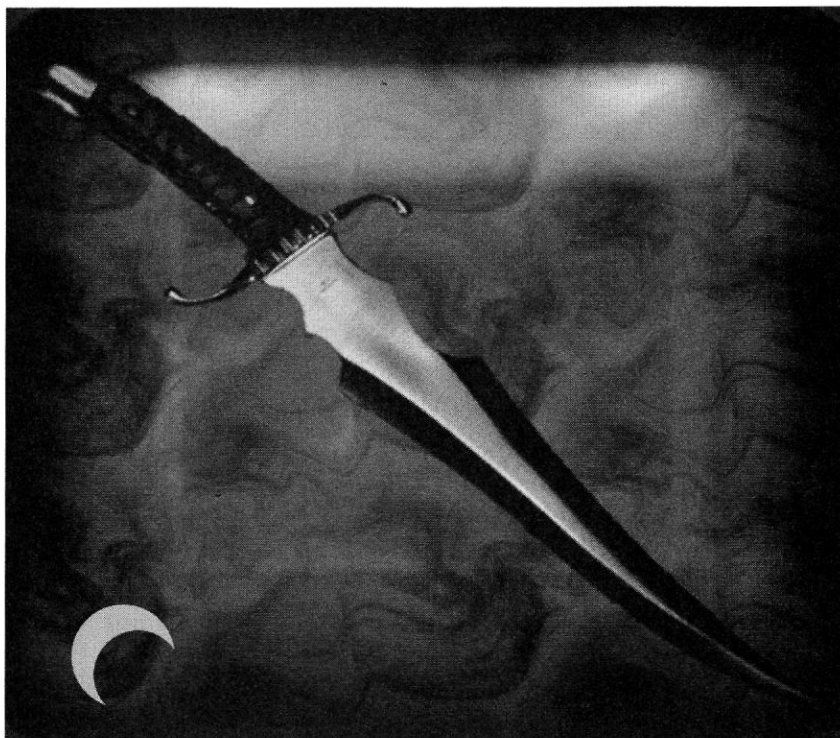
Rhyling's first concern upon her arrival in the valley was the defense of her troupe. As soon as shelters and provisions were established, Rhyling and her followers set about creating magical wards, traps, and illusions to

protect their valley. These magics were adjusted to blend with the changing seasons and were improved upon over time. Eventually, long after Rhyling's demise, the residents developed the natural ability to see the magical auras that identified their traps and wards, sparing themselves from the dangers of their own protections. The isolation of the valley and the high level of magic use led to the evolution of a people with numerous natural magical abilities and an amazing aptitude for wielding magic. Unfortunately, paranoia was bred into them along with magical powers, and the people of Rhylingvale still spend a great deal of time concerned with magical defenses.

Members of this secret world sometimes venture forth to purchase supplies and materials unavailable in their valley. They travel under a variety of magical and mundane disguises. But since Rhylingfolk are poor fighters, especially against wild beasts, the community fashioned a trio of daggers to aid the brave souls who travel from the village. These daggers confer abilities of speed, confusion of the enemy, invisibility at will, and a number of other powers; thus, they are carried by the three leaders of any expedition outside Rhylingvale. Their powers are available only when wielded by a wizard; in the hands of nonmagical users, they perform as ordinary blades.

Unfortunately, a spring expedition several years ago ended in disaster when a late snowstorm swept over the mountains and caught a party off guard. All six members were lost, along with the three daggers. The residents of Rhylingvale know that the daggers lie in a deep crevice, but have decided not to retrieve them since the crevice is about halfway down the mountain, and recovering them would run a risk of exposing their community.

The daggers now lie abandoned, waiting for an especially warm summer to thaw perpetual snow, or for some unfortunate soul to slip into the crevice and discover the treasure that lies there.



Friz, Dagger of the White Dragon

The bones of a dead adventuring party are the only testament that remains of the story of Friz, a dagger of perpetual, dangerous cold. The adventurers, whose names have long ago been forgotten, began the tale with their assault on Fyffergollaz, a white dragon living in an ice cave of the frozen reaches. Before their deaths, the thief in the group flung his dagger at the great wyrm, and the blade stuck fast under a scale behind the dragon's wing. Barely noticeable to the huge creature, the dagger remained wedged there for over two hundred years.

On a spring day with warmth bordering on uncomfortable for a white dragon, Fyffergollaz was winging toward his cave and passed over a small village. Perhaps the heat of the sun loosened the dagger, for it fell from the dragon's wing and landed with a thunk in a potted plant in front of a tiny home. Within a few minutes, the plant was withered and frozen to death.

The mistress of the house, a young woman named Katya, noticed her withered plant and examined the pot. She discovered the dagger, and when she tried to pull it from the soil, Katya fell back with a cry of pain. The soil in the pot was frozen solid, and Katya suffered a freezing burn on her palm from the handle of the dagger.

Soon everyone in the village had learned the strange story of Katya's dagger. Some guessed that pixies or fairies had stuck it in the pot; a few suspected an evil practitioner of magic; only one surmised that it had fallen from the sky. Upon examination, the local cleric felt certain that dragon magic was involved, but beyond that, he

could only guess.

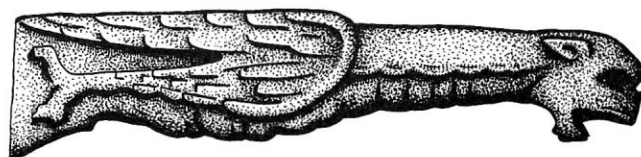
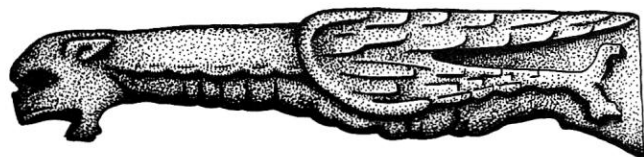
Being a curious young woman, Katya began to experiment with the dagger. Some of her friends thought she should cast it into the lake, but Katya determined to keep the weapon. She found that she could use the blade for various tasks if she wore heavy mittens. The blade never grew dull, so it was the perfect tool for harvesting vegetables, skinning deer, cutting cloth, and even wood carving. The blade was constantly as cold as ice, and Katya discovered that she could store it along with food inside a wooden chest and keep many foods longer than normal. She even found that the blade glowed slightly for about a day before any snowstorm began.

Katya also learned that the touch of the dagger could freeze liquids such as milk and water, and even vegetables, meat, and other foods. By wrapping it in towels, the dagger became a cold compress to nurse bruises, sprains, and fevers. And on warm summer days, the dagger seemed able to cool the air in the tiny house when left in the path of a breeze.

One evening, Katya was tending her animals in the barn before retiring to bed. As she left the barn, she heard a low growl. A wolf

stood perhaps six feet from her, and it snarled hungrily. As the wolf leaped to attack, Katya swung with her dagger and the blade bit into the animal's shoulder. The wolf fell to the ground, yelping in pain even as the dagger slipped free. The terrorized animal immediately fled into the night.

Katya valued her dagger even more after that night. It became her most useful tool, and although she would never lend it to anyone, she sometimes used it to help her friends and neighbors. Many villagers have offered her large sums of money for the tool, but as yet, Katya has refused to trade the dagger she calls Friz.



Finnard's Backbiter

In the remote halfling hovel of Thinsletown lived a family known as the Burrowmaster family. As their name suggests they were skilled at constructing halfling burrows, as well as mining and carpentry in general. Bobo Burrowmaster was the head of the family, along with his wife Sissy and their six halfling children. The youngest of these was a boy named Finnard, whose defiance of the family business and his father's wishes was evident from an early age. Finnard thought not of digging holes and nailing wood, but of traveling to far off lands in search of grand adventure. Often did he practice slaying monsters or stabbing unsuspecting enemies in the back with a small wooden stick, to the complete dismay of his disapproving father. Above all, Finnard swore he would one day find adventure—little did he know that one day his wish would come true.

While reluctantly burrowing out a hovel for newly married halfling couple, Finnard stumbled upon a forgotten tomb. His curiosity getting the best of him the young halfling told no one of his discovery, and returned that night to further explore the ancient sepulcher. Finnard's initial search discovered that there was little here, a far cry from his dreams of unimaginable wealth. His search of every nook and cranny of the tomb revealed a few coins of a mint he did not recognize, which did offer him some reward for this effort. Soon, there was no place left to look except inside the dusty stone sarcophagus.

Utilizing tools he had brought with him, and scared out of his mind, Finnard's curiosity had finally gotten the bet-

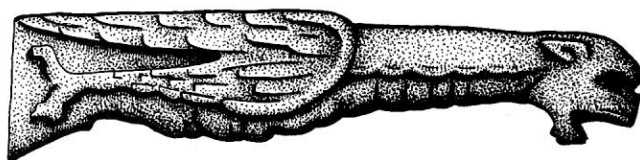
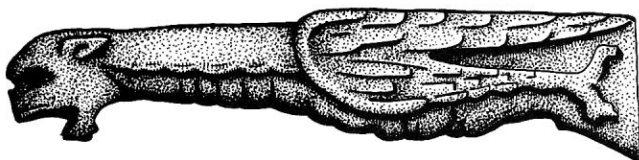
ter of him - and he pried off the lid. The ancient stone crashed to the floor in a pile of broken rubble, revealing the skeletal remains of a human draped in tattered clothing. In the hands of the corpse was a large knife that appeared unaffected by the passage of time. Finnard snatched up the weapon, then quickly fled without turning back.

The next day, Bobo Burrowmaster discovered the tomb while checking up on his delinquent son's work. Seeing that Finnard had obviously desecrated the hidden mausoleum, his punishment to the boy would be severe. Hearing of his plight from his siblings, the young halfling gathered what few belongings he had and fled Thinsletown - never to return. In search of adventure far from the holes his family used to dig in the ground, Finnard hooked up with several small caravans headed to more populated sections of the land. It was his hope never to see the burrows of his homeland again.

With a small bag of possessions, and a pocket full of coins he took from the tomb, Finnard headed for the streets of a nearby kingdom to try his hand at whatever adventure presented itself. What he found instead was trouble. When the halfling stopped to purchase a loaf of bread with the coins he had pilfered from the tomb, the merchant gave him an extremely troubling look when he quickly stashed them into his pocket. Within minutes of leaving the merchant, the young Finnard was surrounded by local members of the thieves' guild. Without even an introduction, the men demanded the blade Finnard found. Fearing for his life, the halfling was going to give it to them when the city watch arrived.

In the confusion, Finnard fled to the darkest corners of the district. While in hiding the halfling overheard two men searching for him, which answered many of his questions. It seems the blade belonged to a long-dead master assassin, and was rumored to greatly benefit any member of the deadly profession. The coins happened to be of his own personal mint, and all were said to have been melted down except the few that were entombed with him. The blade was said to enable the possessor to easily kill an opponent from behind, which was often the way of the assassin. Originally, the blade had been buried with its master because it was said to bestow a terrible curse on whomever held it. Later, this was dismissed as an erroneous tale told by those who would have the weapon for their own.

Upon his death loyal retainers spirited the assassin's body far from the city, burying it with only the deadly blade and a few coins. The appearance of these coins would someday mark the return of the blade some called Backbiter. Since that day Finnard has been on the run, with a hefty price on his head, and every assassin in the land looking for him.



Blade of the Hunter

The Fellowship of the Fallen Oak is a group of rangers and druids dedicated to the preservation of nature and all her children. Those who would abuse the animals of the forest, or needlessly harvest trees or other resources have been opposed by this fellowship for as long as the oldest elf can remember. This society has many members, all of whom are recognized by a gold pendent of an oak leaf. The leader of this organization is typically a ranger or druid of exceptional skill, and is identified by a magical blade that is always carried at his or her side—the Blade of the Hunter. The origin of his blade is a well known story, told to children as well as adults to help understand the sanctity of nature and her precious children.

There once was a comely young half-elf ranger named Eyballe, whose loveliness was exceeded only by her deadly sword arm. Eyballe and a handful of comrades formed the Fellowship of the Fallen Oak after their village was burned to the ground by the vile breath of a red dragon. For as long as anyone could remember this dragon exacted a levy upon many small townships of humans and their kin several times a year, else he would burn their crops and eat their livestock. After one particular village refused to pay, the dragon took grave exception to their defiance and slew all but a few lucky survivors. Eyballe was one of these survivors.

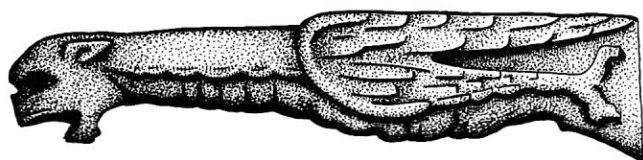
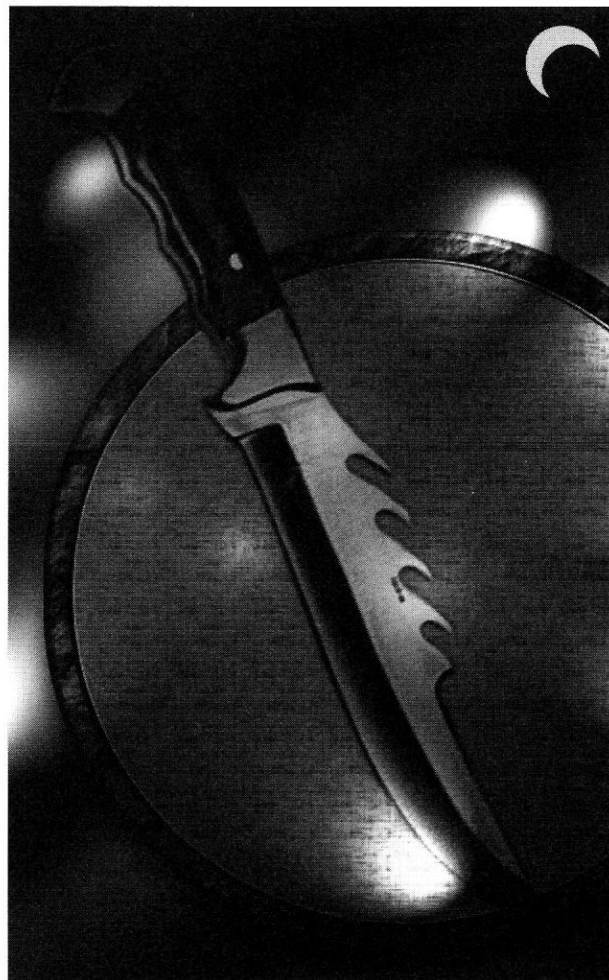
Those who lived soon armed themselves with whatever weapons and armor they could find, and it was Eyballe who discovered an exceptional knife among the ruins of a retired local adventurer. Placing it at her side, Eyballe and two dozen surviving cohorts headed for the lair of the malicious red wyrm. The battle against the dragon began extremely one-sided, and many of her fellow villagers fell before the red's first blast of fiery breath. Knowing they would probably not survive another assault, let alone the beast's massive claws and tail, Eyballe took matters into her own hands. Somehow amidst the confusion of the battle she managed to get herself atop the dragon's head, and plunged the knife deep into the dragon's skull. The wyrm screamed in horror, and surprisingly dropped dead to the cave floor. Along with those that survived, Eyballe claimed the dragon's hoard and formed a fellowship of protectors to safeguard the lands from threats such as this for generations to come.

Behind the leadership of Eyballe, and the substantial hoard of the dragon, the Fellowship of the Fallen Oak protects the wilderness from all forms of evil and iniquity to this day. Over the years Eyballe discovered the blade she used to slay the dragon had very powerful magical properties, leading her to believe it was especially crafted for a ranger or druid. She called it Blade of the Hunter,

and decreed that whoever led the group would wear it.

Long after the death of Eyballe, the legend of the Blade of the Hunter has continued to grow. The possessor of the blade has said to have killed another invading dragon (in addition to the red), a rampaging stone giant, a clan of owlbeats, and even a high-level wizard who wanted to turn a nearby forest into a small desert. Whether there is truth to these tales or not, all of them center around the Blade of the Hunter. Only once has the weapon ever been lost, stolen from the murdered body of one of the Fellowship's past leaders. With nearly the entire conclave on the thief's trail, the blade did not stay lost for long. In most cases, the Blade of the Hunter means more to the members of the Fellowship than their own lives.

In addition to its keen edge in battle, many have found that as long as they possessed the Blade of the Hunter they could never get lost. It also helped the possessor hide amongst the trees of the forest, and could even find a single acorn among a sea of fallen leaves. It was for this reason it was deemed that the weapon would always to be given to the leader of the Fellowship of the Fallen Oak. Over the years the blade has had at least 20 owners, all leaders of the valiant ensemble.



The Devourer

History

Even at a young age Goran Windwhisper was a master jester, circus performer, beggar, and rogue of the highest caliber. While he enjoyed his life in the circus, he enjoyed gold so much more. Goran's life of crime began at an early age, during a time when most young thieves were often caught practicing their trade. His thin build, unassuming eyes, and unadorned looks gave no one suspicion, and by his late teens Goran had secretly amassed several thousand gold pieces during his travels with a popular circus troupe. While he was quickly becoming a master thief, Goran was not one to kill another person for their wealth. Never did he injure those he stole from, for what test of skill is that for a thief? It was more challenging to the young rogue to relieve someone of their currency without them being the wiser.

Just after his 17th summer had passed, Goran stumbled across a man leaving the circus' evening performance. Looking to pilfer his pocket, the thief snuck up to him just in time to see him fall over dead. Quickly, Goran pilfered through his pockets, extracting a few coins along with a brilliant knife of exceptional quality. Turning him over to see who had just died, Goran gasped at the horror before him. The man was as gaunt as could be, as if he had not eaten for weeks. His flesh looked shrunken and shriveled on his bones, and his eyes could almost not be seen they were so deep in his skull. Frightened and not wanting to be blamed for the man's death, Goran quickly departed the area and returned to the circus. In the days that followed he would realize what a mistake it was to steal the knife from the dead man.

Two days after stealing the blade, Goran became ill. What began as an upset stomach quickly progressed to intense headaches and extreme nausea within hours. In an effort to boost his strength Goran decided to cook him-

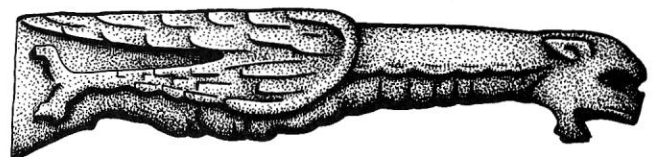
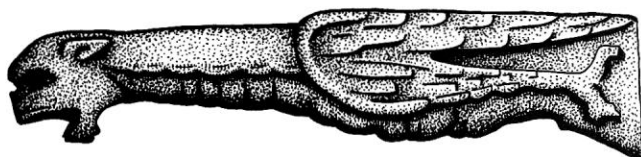
self a meal. As was common among members of the circus, Goran went to the livestock pen to kill himself a chicken for dinner. Drawing this newly stolen blade, the thief beheaded the fowl as he had done hundreds of times before; however, this time was different. To his surprise, after killing the chicken with the blade he noticeably felt less ill. Goran quickly killed another, and another—afterwards there was no doubt that killing the chickens lessened whatever affliction he had.

While trying to puzzle out what was happening to him, one of the animal trainers suddenly appeared to feed the chickens for the day. The man tragically tripped as he moved forward, falling into Goran and impaling himself on his blade. The blade seemed to suck the life from the man, giving it to Goran and curing him of whatever it

was that ailed him. Days later Goran realized it was the blade that was making him ill, feeding off his life force, and in order to replenish it he had to kill others.

The next morning Goran took all of his possessions and fled the circus. Within days he found himself sick again, and attempted to feed the blade's hunger by killing local livestock and capturing small animals. However, the death of animals did not satisfy the blade's hunger for long, and soon Goran discovered that only by killing people did unpleasant sickness subside—but it always returned.

Eventually Goran took to killing people to survive. After taking the life of a human or humanoid he could go for days without feeling the cursing bite of the blade. Many times he thought to just end it all and allow the item to suck the life from him—just as it did from the one he took it from. However, in the end Goran was a coward and did not want to die. In time Goran was killed by one of his intended victims trying defending himself. That poor soul soon learned the curse of the blade himself, and so the deadly cycle began again. Since Goran the wicked weapon has had dozens of owners, all of whom eventually perished as a result of possessing the blade.



Gloomwing

The story of the dagger Gloomwing is inextricably intertwined with its sibling Glimmerwing. Each holds a part of its creator's soul—Gloomwing holds all that was evil in its creator, and Glimmerwing holds all that was good. Above all else, the two blades wish to destroy each other, proving the dominance of their moral stand by eliminating the other. The only way to destroy one of the two blades, however, is to bring it into physical contact with its counterpart, and this will destroy both weapons, not just one. Thus, the two soul-bearing weapons are always trying, whether they realize it or not, to end their own existence.

Also in the equation is the elf Iana Genower, who bears Glimmerwing and searches for Gloomwing. She seeks the blades because their creator, her teacher and friend, lies comatose until his soul is restored to him by touching him with both blades, which will also destroy them. This search is complicated by the fact that neither weapon can be found by divination magic—a side effect of their creation. Still, she searches, traveling from city to city, seeking news of the missing dagger.

Gloomwing was actually found by a group of adventurers in the lair of a rakshasa, and it was brought back to civilization for sale, as none of them could bear to use the evil weapon but had no qualms about selling it to someone who could. The purchaser was a quiet, nondescript man named Athol, who ran a small shipping concern in Adalia. Or rather, he appeared to do so, for in reality Athol was the king's own personal assassin.

Athol's family had long been

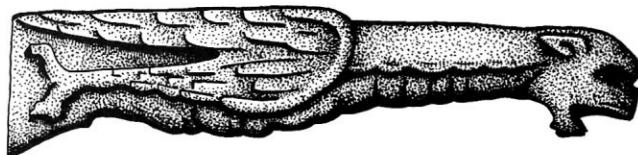
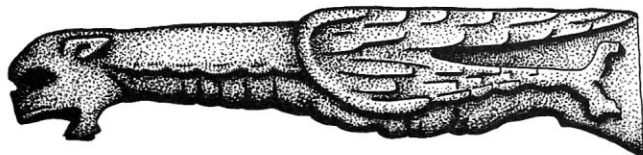
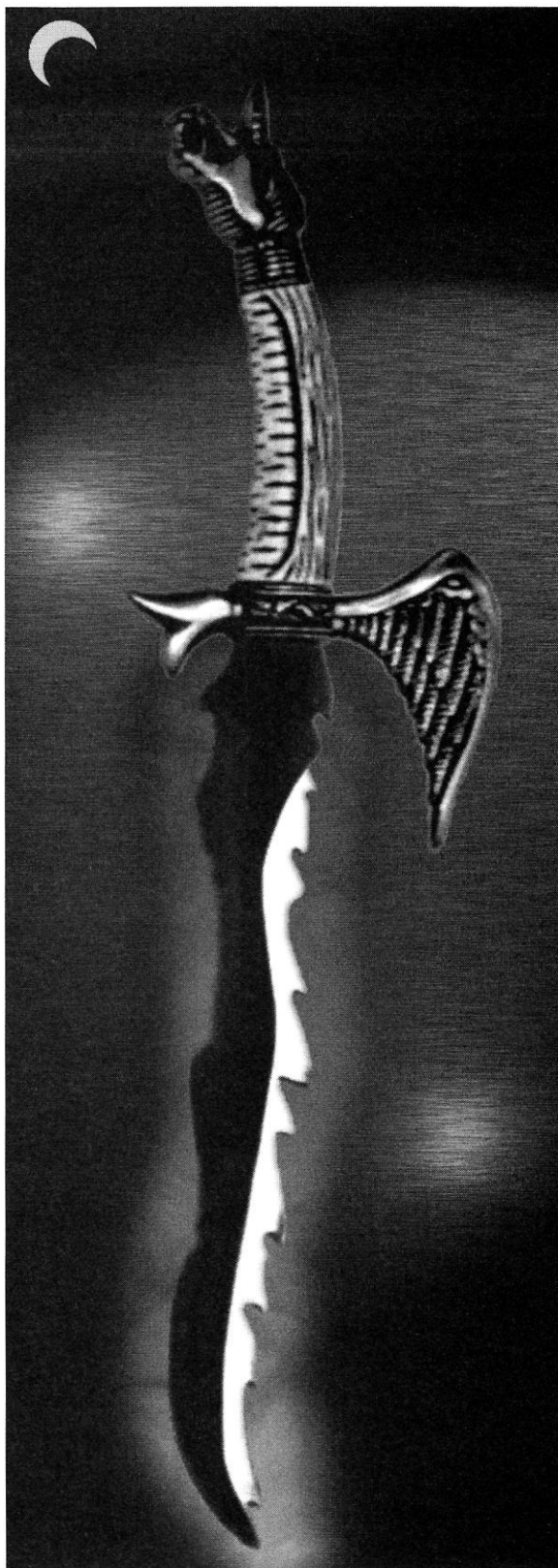
loyal to the royal line, which is not surprising, as they were secretly an illegitimate offshoot of it. Athol was the king's distant cousin, and his family had always been

available to serve the king in whatever capacity was required. As Athol grew up, he discovered to his surprise that he was not a particularly nice fellow, and after he clubbed another youth to death in an alley for making fun of him, he found he rather liked the sense of power killing gave him.

Over time, Athol's natural inclinations were put to work, first as a warrior in the king's army and later, in secret, as a killer for hire. When Athol was caught sneaking into the castle to kill a minor noble, he was brought before his cousin, who recognized him and offered him a job instead of having him executed. From that time forward, Athol pretended to work as a merchant, using that cover as an excuse to move around the kingdom freely to make access to his victims easier. In time, he came to manage the shipping concern, giving him more time for his real job.

Athol had Gloomwing for only a short period of time, using it on a couple of jobs before being sent by his cousin to kill a traitor who had fled across the sea to the island kingdom of Ghayta. Along the way, a hideous storm erupted, which swept Athol and several crewmembers over the side of the ship he traveled on. Athol was able to swim to the ship and was rescued, but Gloomwing fell into the depths of the sea. Shrugging his shoulders, Athol went on about his work, and has put the lost blade firmly out of his mind.

Gloomwing, meanwhile, waits on the bottom of the sea for someone to find it and use it again. Sailors being what they are, surely one of them saw Athol lose the blade and will sell that information to treasure-hunting adventurers? Or, possibly, to Iana?



Hawkeye

The story of the dagger Hawkeye ostensibly begins with its creation, but it does not begin to truly unfold until much later. Forged and enchanted by the humans of Rushcurr kingdom for the ranger Aidan Hosler, in gratitude for his help in maintaining peace between them and the nearby elves of Charluser, Hawkeye was paired with a sword of elven make, named Whistler. With Whistler in one hand and Hawkeye in the other, Aidan was a living representation of the unity of the two races and a hero to both. Thus, when he died, both kingdoms mourned, and he was laid to rest in the neutral grove he had helped create with both of his signature weapons.

The blades lay quiescent in the rich soil alongside Aidan's remains and other possessions for nearly three centuries, and time had seemingly passed them by. As they rested, however, relations between the elves and humans began to decay again, and Aidan's successors were not up to the task of preserving the peace. Open warfare began between Rushcurr and Charluser with an attack by the elves, and the greatest of the elven warriors were humbled by what seemed to be an unstoppable flood of bloodthirsty humans. The elves retreated in confusion to their home.

The humans followed, eager to loot the fabled wealth of Charluser. Along the way, they passed through Aidan's grove between the two kingdoms and destroyed everything in sight, cursing the memory of a man they had once respected but now dubbed traitor. Even Aidan's grave was not safe; it was opened and looted, his bones strewn across the glade. Yet every time someone tried to

pick up one of the two famous blades, a dark chill came over them and they let go, warned that the magic in the blades was not meant for such as them.

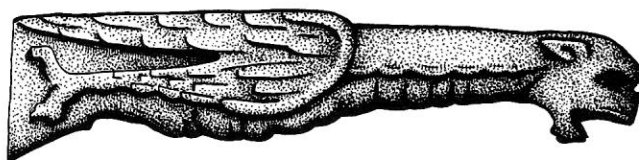
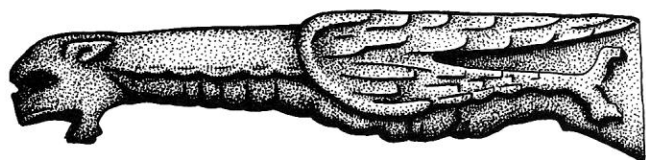
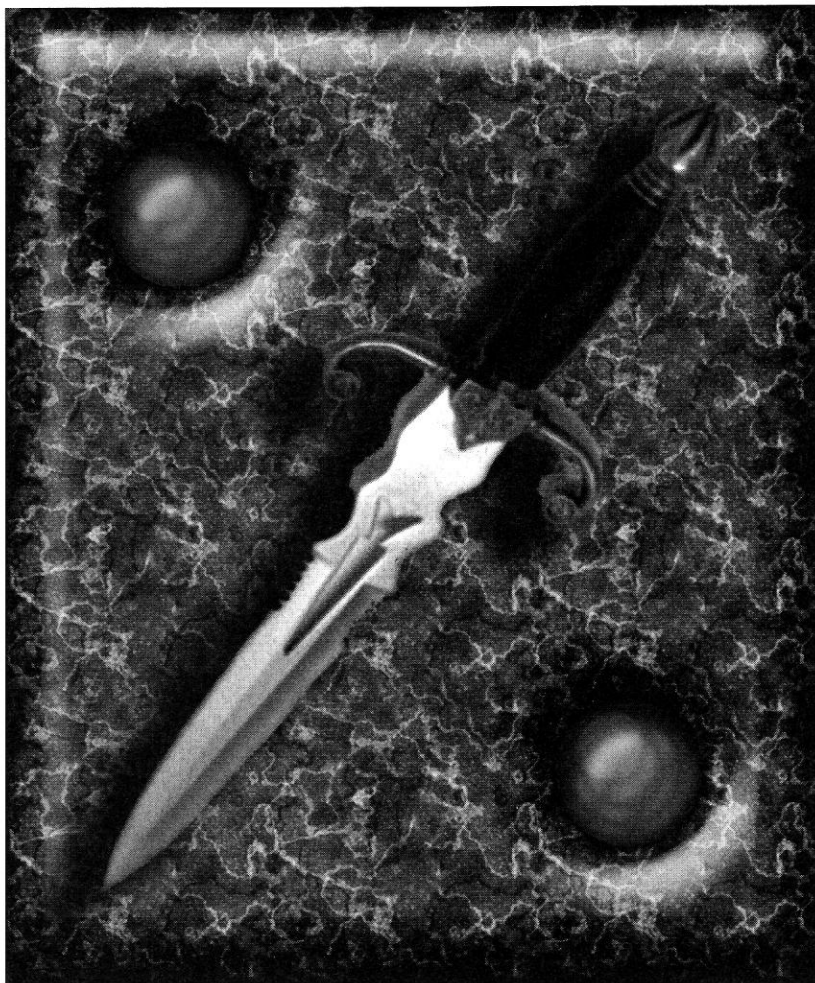
The army soon moved on, eager to travel on to Charluser, whose delicate spires they would wreath in flame. In their wake came the supply trains, camp followers, and finally the scavengers—pitiful creatures who survived by selling whatever hidden treasures the soldiers did not find. One of them, a particularly crafty individual

named Stunch, used a broken shield to dig Hawkeye out and put it in a sack, which he then tied to a pole. He found that carrying the blade this way did not incur the chill, though he couldn't use it, either.

Stunch searched the grave for Whistler, but by this time the entire area was a mess and he gave it up as a lost cause. He quickly made his way back to Rushcurr, eager to sell his new acquisition, but he soon found that anyone interested in buying the weapon lost that interest after experiencing the dark chill. He traveled from city to city, kingdom to kingdom, in hopes of selling Hawkeye, but no one in any of the black markets he visited could use the blade, and so he kept moving, now obsessed with

locating a buyer for his find.

His final attempt to sell the dagger can be described only as idiocy. Traveling deep underground, Stunch intended to sell Hawkeye to a dwarf rumored to collect objects of power. Unluckily for him, he never made it there. As he stopped by a pool of water to quench his thirst, he saw what appeared to be a large pile of gold in the shallow water. Stunch waded in, only to fall prey to Ygglahtysha, an aboleth living in the pool. Now he is the awful creature's mindless slave, and Hawkeye rests with its other treasures in the subterranean lake.



Frostblessing

From *Legends of the Uncivilized*, by Willock Graff:

Far to the north, beyond even the plains that the Baghruz call home, the land grows mountainous and rocky and — most of all — cold. Quite possibly the hardest of all humans make their home there. They call themselves the Kian, which means "blessed" in their tongue. The name refers to the deeply spiritual nature of the Kian, who all pay homage to a goddess known only as Lady Cold.

According to Kian legend, their people were once much more numerous and strong. This was when they were truly favored by Lady Cold, and she worked actively on behalf of the Kian to ensure they stayed strong and proud as a people. This all changed with what the Kian call the Great Failure, which they claim is the direct cause of their current small numbers and reduced territory.

The tale of the great failure begins with an argument between Lady Cold and her brother Lord Thunder. For days, the heavens shook with the sounds of Lord Thunder's rage, and Lady Cold's anger brought a horrible chill to the land. Finally, one hunter braved the wilderness in search of food for his family. As he searched, he saw a many-colored light descend from the sky, after which the cold eased and the thunder ceased. Investigating, he found a bright crystal lying in a snow bank.

At that moment, the snow in the area began to blow so violently that the hunter could not see, and when the wind died away seconds later a beautiful woman, nude and formed entirely of ice, was standing over the crystal. Realizing that this must be Lady Cold, the hunter fell to his knees in the snow and averted his gaze, chanting

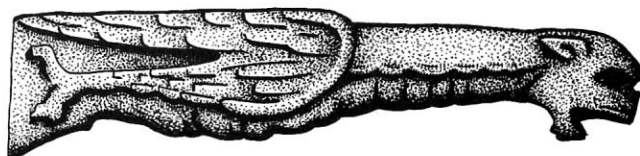
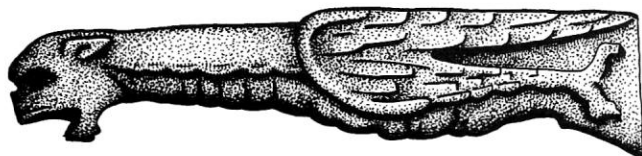
prayers. She bade him look at her, and when he did she was smiling.

"I have been having a discussion with my brother, and the rude oaf has chipped off a piece of my palace in the sky" said the goddess, gesturing at the crystal. "I came to reclaim it, but I am touched by your faith and piety. Instead, I give you a commandment — take this crystal and use it to make a dagger, which shall be a symbol of the faith of the Kian and will hold a small part of my power."

The hunter could only nod, and with another sudden snowstorm, Lady Cold was gone. He carefully gathered up the crystal and returned home to tell his story, doing as his goddess demanded and smithing a fine dagger with the crystal as the hilt. He called it Arskianna, which roughly translated is "Frostblessing," and it became a relic of the Kian. Whoever bore it could withstand any cold and was healed by the touch of snow or ice. In addition, the dagger could paralyze beasts to protect the Kian — but its most potent ability was calling and controlling enormous frost worms.

In time, priests of the goddess would use this ability to ride the worms as mounts across the land, and it was while doing this that the Great Failure occurred. As a priest traveled in the wilderness on the back of a frost worm, he happened across an area claimed by a remorhaz. The hatred frost worms hold for remorhaz is well known, and a savage battle erupted. The frost worm was slain, Frostblessing was lost, and a badly wounded priest

crawled back to the nearest village to tell his story, where he was promptly beaten to death by angry Kian. Since then, the Kian have searched near and far for their holy weapon, believing that finding it as the only way to reenter their goddess's good graces.



Thaving Tor

The dagger Thaving Tor (Tagirolian: Kiss of the Sorcerer) was the personal blade of Ahumira of Tagirol, a great wizard who led the defense of the Tagirolian Empire against the ravages of the Dark Lord. It is told in the Twenty-Fourth Book of the Dodekiad, the great Tagirolian epic, that Ahumira's powers were vast, nearly limitless. He combined this power with an equally limitless wisdom, except in one key aspect – he never took any threat to his well being seriously. After the sacrifice of the Tagirolian capital Redwald (and the concomitant destruction of the Dark Lord), Ahumira continued to serve the emperors, and he was the principle architect of Darrwald, the new Tagirolian capital city. Two hundred years after his greatest victory, with his health failing, he took upon himself a final journey. It was his intention to travel over the mountains to Kindralia, the famed land of gold, where the last of the Tagirolian Twelve had lived for the last 120 years (she was one-quarter elf, though she attributed her long life to good friends and healthy eating). He had grown increasingly wistful, forgetful, and filled with longing in his declining years; the emperor, the great-great-great grandson of the Emperor of the Crisis, was keen of eye and knew the depths of Ahumira's sacrifices. He let Ahumira go.

The wizard either came upon some mountain trolls or perhaps some ettins when he was trying to make the passage. Although it was early summer, the mountain passes were known for their often impassable condition, and even in early summer, snows were not unheard of. Such a

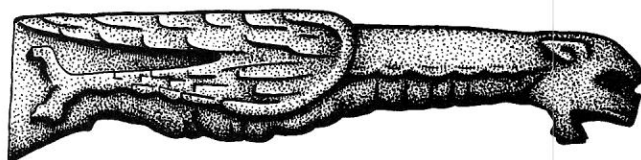
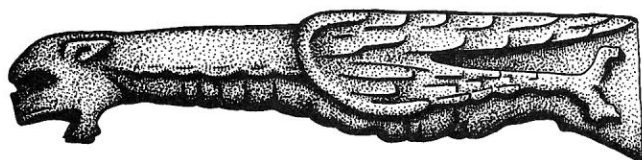
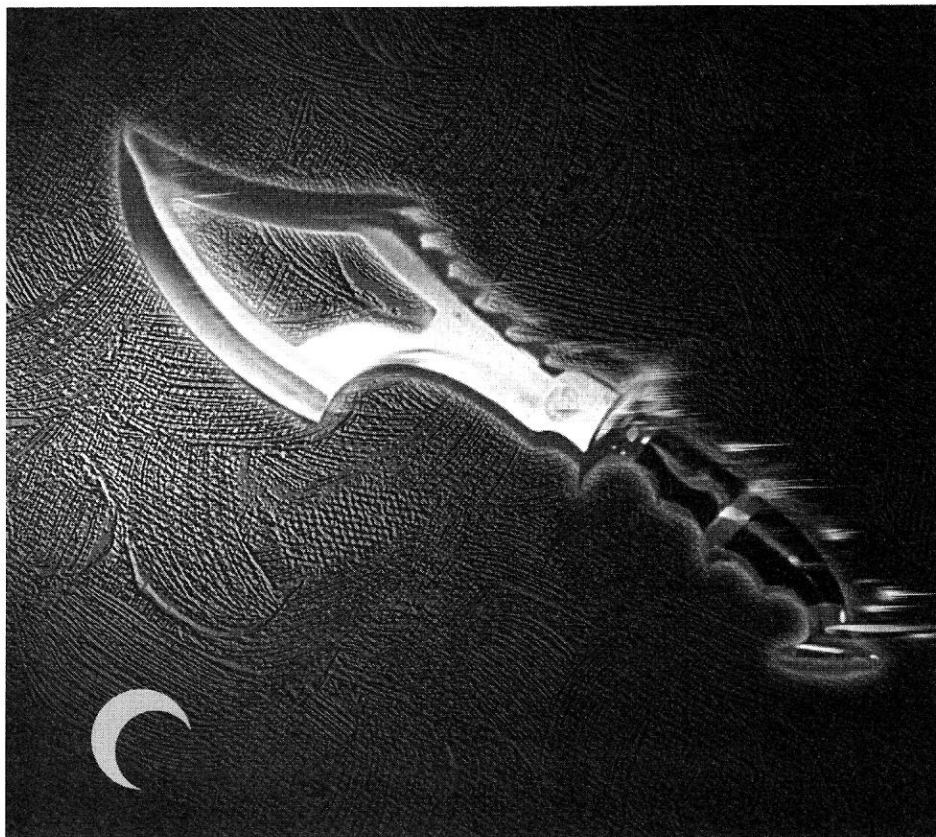
beautiful knife – but it appeared not to be sufficient in the increasingly feeble hands of the wizard. He never spoke of the blade, its origins, or its magicks, but none doubted its powers. When the wizard did not return to Darrwald, messengers were sent to Kindralia. He never arrived. Which meant that his dagger and perhaps his even more famous ring were lost in the mountains.

Though the ring has never been found, when the dagger reappears in our histories, it was in the possession of the goblins of the Icecrushers. As is their wont, the goblins had no idea what they had, and they lost the dagger

in a game of chance with an adventuring party of gnomes who, somehow, were able to get away unscathed, though the Icecrushers, to this day, have never forgotten the insult. It is a rule of thumb that if you place an interesting item in the custody of a handful of gnomes, it is bound to become an item of contention. If the item is a dagger whose glimmer of magic is bright enough to read by at night, there might actually be fighting. As, of course, there was. The gnomes were nowhere near home when two of them set upon the

others, and then set upon each other, to determine the ultimate ownership of the knife. I would theorize that the knife itself, possessing a rudimentary consciousness, perhaps caused the gnomes to attack one another (a reasonably uncommon occurrence at best).

So how did I come into possession of Thaving Tor? A question for another time, perhaps. Suffice it to say that one does not need to be strong or even particularly clever to steal anything from a gnome, provided you know exactly what you're doing. Simple historian I may be, but the dagger has been waiting for someone to appreciate it for some time. Someone like it. Someone like me.



Hrastok

In the whole of Eisland, the frozen island at the top of the world, there is but a single god who's light shines on the devious tricksters without whom the Eislanders would live less interesting lives. Lokastenka is the name of that god, and among all the thieves, scoundrels, pick-pockets, mountebanks and charlatans who walk that isle, none is more favored of the god than Staal Trantar, known to some as Staal the Fiendish and to others as Staal the Grotesque and to others still (particularly the women of Akriy, who are every one as virginal as the goddess Reir) as Staal the Not-So-Clever. None of these sobriquets actually hit their mark, however. Staal the Blessed might be the most appropriate, for Lokastenka loves none more.

In the chill streets of Narvik, the "capital" of Eisland, a story of Staal circulates. He has never denied the tale's accuracy, though he has refused to fill in any of the details. The story goes something like this:

Some time ago, there came a visitor to Eisland. He dressed well, better than average, and spoke a highly educated form of Eisish. He claimed that he came aboard a ship en route from Helluland, but no one was ever able to confirm this. He carried himself like an aristocrat, relatively rare in democratic Eisland, and had a cocky self-confidence. Upon finding the Puffin's Demise, the preferred tavern of shifty types, he ordered up a beer and observed. It wasn't long before the sun set—in the autumn it set quite early—and the business picked up.

It was not Staal who entered first, though that is who the stranger had come to see, but rather an assortment of

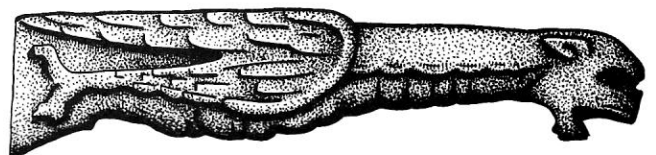
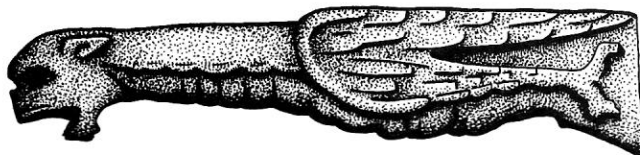
half-hearted, poorly skilled thieves whom the small Eislandish guild wouldn't even bother to admit. They still found some business, though an insufficient amount in small Narvik to maintain themselves. When Staal entered around 8 o'clock, the fun began. He lumbered into the bar, letting the frigid night air in, and sank into a tall chair, his lanky frame only poorly supported by its narrow back.

It was not long before the stranger's boastful language, arrogance and, frankly, drunken state had roused the bar into a frenzy. The conversation ended with a challenge

from the stranger—any person who could steal the dagger from his side (at this point he revealed it—a nasty, short curved blade) without being noticed would receive a pot of gold. And just to prove that he wasn't a leprechaun, he showed the assembly the pot, and the gold. To make things interesting, the stranger would also attempt to steal his opponents' weapons. If he did, they were no longer in the competition.

Perhaps it isn't surprising that the offer of that much gold got the thieves of Narvik excited. And it wasn't long before the common folk of Narvik were also thanking the stranger, for sparing them from being the targets of the mountebanks for at least a short time. It took less than a week for the competition to conclude. It seemed that the stranger could either walk on the ceiling or pass through walls. Somehow, each day, he consistently had stolen two or three more of his opponents' weapons. By the end of the week, only Staal was left in the running, and despite the usual hostility to him, his fellow thieves were pulling for him, if only to get the stranger at least once!

How he managed to achieve it, he has not yet told, but on the last day, Staal appeared with the stranger's dagger in his hand, and he has never relinquished it since.



Sacred Knife of the Rainbow

...came into the room, holding more of the strange quilted robes in her hands. She bade us dress, using a charming pantomime to replace the language we could not understand. We took the robes and began to dress, but to my surprise, the maid neither left nor blushed during this procedure. She did seem greatly amused by our endeavors to properly secure the garments, but she did not attempt to assist us at any time.

Once we were dressed, she led my party outside, into the street. I marveled again at the way the tall sides of the valley walls blocked the harsh winds, leaving the weather brisk, but not deadly. Though I had thought the mountain people underdressed for their climate before, I understood better now the ingenuity of their costume.

We walked down the street to a large building, considerably more ornate than the others. Carved figures dominated each post of the structure, and all horizontal supports showed graceful, curving lines, mimicking the sweep of the wind against the snowdrifts. Once inside, our lovely guide vanished into the crowds on either side of the main aisle. A man stepped forward, wearing finely crafted robes and bearing an unusual blade in his right hand.

I could feel Marbos grow tense at my right, but the man's stance as he held the knife was anything but threatening. He raised it above his head, holding it horizontally so that the firelight rippled on the blade. He waited a few seconds in what was obviously a ceremonial ritual, then laid the knife reverently on a small altar to the side. He then looked at us and spoke a few halting words: "Eshra greets you."

Throughout my small group, tension washed away and smiles broke out upon our faces. To hear a few familiar words in a new voice is enough to melt the most hardened heart. The small crowd cheered, and suddenly eager friends surrounded us. The priest (for such he was) was the only one to speak our language, but the mere possibility of communication made all hearts lighter.

A small dinner commenced, then a series of entertainments. During the festivities, I asked the priest, Eshra, about the ceremony with which he had greeted us. He led me over to the small altar and showed me the blade that served as its center: the Sacred Breath of Eshra.

Eshra is the god or goddess that the mountain people worshipped. He or she is the god of the winds and air, both favorable and unfavorable. The priest told me that the blade at the altar was considered holy, and was used in all ceremonies for Eshra. Apparently Eshra is also viewed as the source of the metal which formed the knife, smelted as it was from "stones that fell from the sky,"

according to Eshra. Every settlement of the mountain people has a temple to Eshra, and most of them use a similar blade to consecrate the altar.

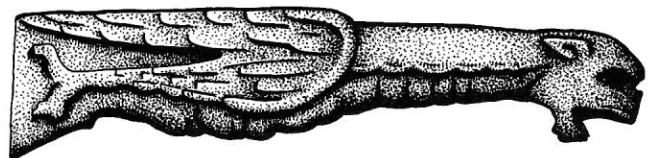
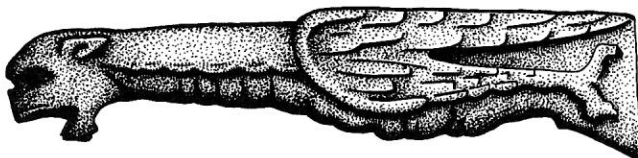
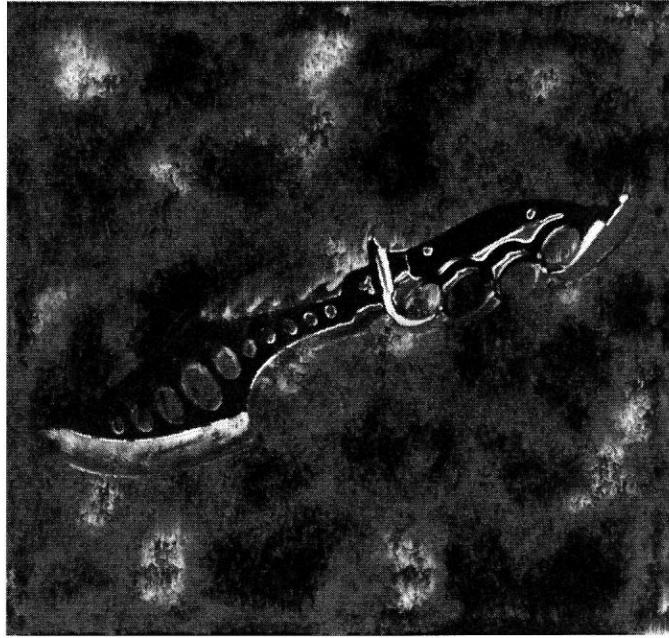
The blade itself is highly unusual. The hilt is formed of an oddly colored wood, with all the colors of the rainbow shown in its hues. The blade itself comes to a wicked upturned point, but it is the back of the blade that proves most interesting. It seems that each blade has a different symbol carved into the back, depicting some aspect of Eshra or the temple to which it belongs. This blade in particular showed two mountain peaks, with a valley in-

between them. The valley contained a long, flat building, obviously made to represent the temple in which we stood.

Eshra told me that Eshra sends each knife's story to the priest's dreams when a new knife is to be forged. Inevitably, the picture shown has a special meaning to the people in the temple's new location—in at least one instance, it led the priests to a new and safer home for the village, saving the entire community from death when an avalanche buried their former site.

I thanked Eshra for explaining some of his faith to me, and then was seated again. The maiden who brought us our clothing had taken up a seat next to mine and refilled my cup with mead. Her blue eyes met mine, and it seemed the room grew warmer. I could tell the evening would be most enjoyable...

from the journal of Alinar Snowmist, Explorer and Diplomat for Her Majesty, the Queen of Gal Lutain



Dagger of Fallen Heroes

"What the hell are you doing?!?" Karu strode across the room, the expression on his face a cross between outrage and astonishment.

"I'm just giving my friend his share." A feeling of deep satisfaction blossomed in the part of my mind that stayed tuned to the dagger. I watched the tapestry burn, half amused by Karu's reaction. "Do you have a problem with that?"

"Problem? Yeah, I've got a problem! You're my problem! That dagger's my problem! That tapestry was a big part of the loot on this haul, and you've gone and sent that up in smoke for a thrice-damned piece of metal! Everything else we got was whore's-pence next to that!" Karu was practically beside himself.

I slowly got to my feet, fingering the dagger's blade as a sudden feeling of bloodlust pressed in on my mind. *No, no, can't get too hasty. You'll just have to get by without killing anyone right now.*

I smiled, letting just a hint of what the dagger wanted show in my eyes. I evidently got my message across, because Karu paled and swallowed hard. "The tapestry was the only thing that would burn easily, Karu. Surely you don't begrudge me a little ease after the work I just did...do you?" I held the knife lightly in my hand, up where he could see it. The edges of the knife were still glowing red from the flames.

"Course not...." Karu ran a hand through his greasy hair and glanced at the knife nervously. "But damn it, Geran...what am I going to tell them? That piece was going to fetch good money. Their shares won't be hardly nothin' now, and they'll come after me for it." He gestured toward the group of thieves standing over the other chests, still engrossed in counting the small change.

"Karu, Karu. You act as though this is somehow unfair. After all, I did all the work getting to the valuables, didn't

I?"

"Yeah, but—"

"And I obtained twice what you told me would be there, didn't I?"

"Yeah, but—"

"I even killed the guardsman standing watch over the Baron's treasury, the one who somehow slipped by your men." I took a step closer to Karu, leaving me close enough to reach out and touch him—or slip the dagger between his ribs, with no one the wiser.

The bloodlust from the dagger sang in my ears, growing stronger with each pulse of my blood. *No, I said! You've had your tribute for today, now get back. Karu's too useful to kill.* The bloodlust subsided into the familiar, impo-

tent rage that came up whenever I denied the dagger its whims.

When I had finished banishing the dagger's impulses, I was amused to see Karu's face. The man was white as a ghost, and the dagger's blade rested lightly on his chest. "I think, perhaps," I said as I traced a pattern on Karu's shirt with the tip of the blade, "if you explain it properly, the thugs will accept it without question. Don't you?"

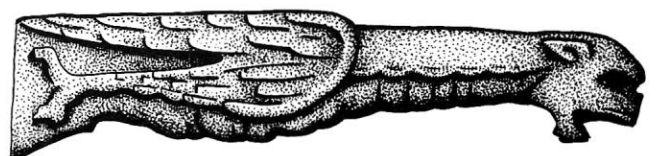
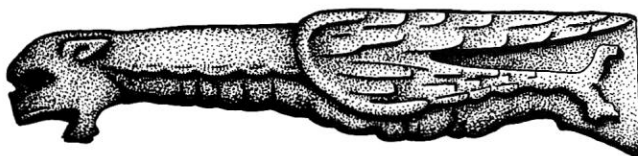
Karu let out a heavy breath as I pulled the blade away from his chest and sheathed it. "S-sure, Geran." He took a quick step back and mustered a sickly smile.

"After all," I said, raising my voice so that it would carry to the others, "it's a thrice-damned shame the thing was a fake. Not even worth carrying out of here."

"Sure thing, Geran." Karu nodded eagerly, his eyes watering from the smoke that drifted around us.

I sat back down next to the small blaze and watched Karu walk away. The dagger's mood was bad; petulant anger throbbed hotly at me, an irritant that not even success could ease away. *Maybe you're right. I think we'll pay Karu a visit. Soon.*

I could swear the dagger laughed.



Blade of Harboken

As legend has it, Harboken was the god-king of all Minotaurs. He was born a lowly slave, indentured to the elven house of Telitha, rulers of the entire Senn continent. He grew up in chains within the Telithan palace. Though his taskmasters continually whipped and beat him, he developed a strong will and deep courage. He also developed a great physical strength, so they assigned him the hardest and most demanding work. But no matter what they tried, they could never break him or his will.

Their every murder attempt failed, while Lady Embeth blocked every arrest and execution attempt, daughter to King Eran Telitha and mistress of the royal palace. "Unless," she said, "you can prove that he is a criminal, you will not harm him."

Throughout his twenty-four years within the royal palace the Minotaurs had been allowed to follow their own gods, to practice their own customs and rituals. Lady Embeth had always seen to that. But then she was found murdered. When they couldn't implicate Harboken, they blamed Harboken's brother Teronn instead, executing him and a dozen others.

That was enough. They had killed his family and the only elf that had ever been good to the Minotaurs. Harboken and his kind could never be safe again. The elves would soon learn the price of their mistakes.

Though he never asked to be a leader, the rest of the slaves looked up to him, man and woman, young and old alike. But it wasn't until the tribe elders summoned him to the blacksmith that he took on the mantle of leadership. They had been forging weapons in secret for many years, using nothing but scrap metal. That night, they were forging blades when Daleth, a powerful wizard and also the palace chancellor, burst in with the royal guard.

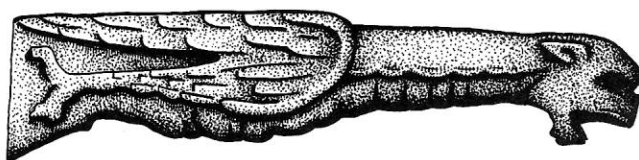
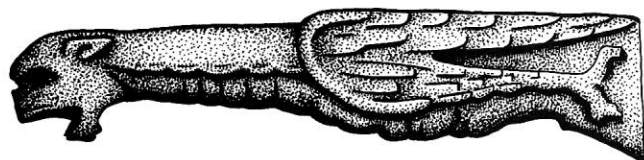
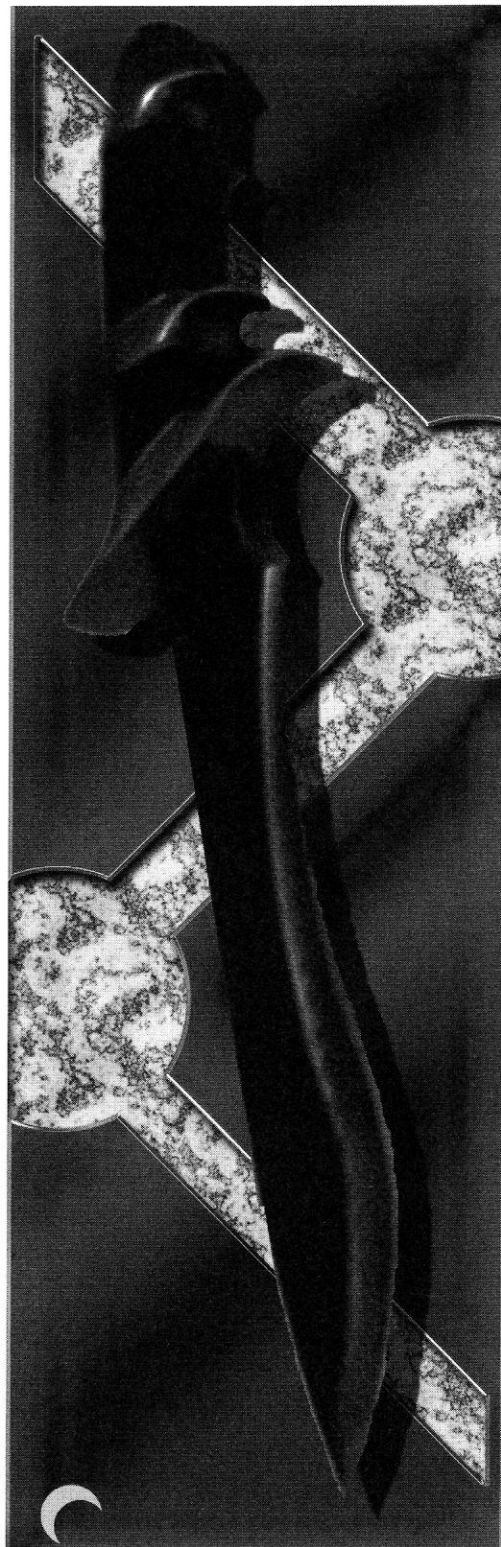
The Minotaur elders immediately leaped into action with their cached weapons, but with Daleth there to support his guards, they stood no chance. Until Harboken grabbed a still-glowing blade from the coals with the blacksmith's glove and launched it at the wizard. It struck

him in the heart just as he was casting a spell. It is said that the red-hot blade drained the energies of not only that spell, but the wizard's entire being as his blood soaked into the dagger. Before the blade had cooled, Harboken had killed another hundred elves with it, including the Telithan king and the Imperial High Magus. Each kill that night only increased the weapon's appetite for elven blood.

Within a year, Harboken had brought the thirteen tribes together and had toppled the Telithan Empire and had formed the Minotaur nation of Urul-Daz. He never tried to conquer or enslave the elves - he could never do to another what they had done to his kind. But he did wage war after war against them, punishing them for their wrongs and sating the appetites of his blade.

When he died, his blade passed to the next leader of the thirteen. For more than five hundred years it was the mantle of Urul-Daz leadership, passed from leader to leader, each feeding the blade's hunger for elven blood.

But then it was lost. A combined elf, dwarven and human army crushed Urul-Daz, killing its leader and scattering the thirteen tribes to the far corners of the world. As legend has it, every being who possessed the Blade of Harboken became murderers of elves, while no elf could pick it up and survive. That continued for over a century until the powerful elven wizard Welin magically bound the blade within an ebony case. Today it rests within his keep in the Jeralsenn Mountains, guarded by him and his retainers.



Keeper Knife

"Well, what's the ring for?" The peasant boy couldn't have been more than sixteen years old. He looked up at an odd knife hanging off the peddler's cart. It had a ring built into the metal hasp.

"Won't slip out of your hand that way," said the peddler, pulling the knife down from a hook. "Blood's right slippery. You ever tried to hang onto something what was all mussed up with blood?"

"No."

"Well, it's right slippery." He grabbed the boy's hands and oriented them properly on the knife. "But with this here ring you just put your first finger in it like so—then you could get pig's grease up and down your arm and it won't come off unless you want it."

The boy was amazed at so simple an innovation. "All right then! Seems like a sturdy knife. I'll give you seven pieces of silver."

The peddler choked. "Seven? You don't know what you're holding do you?"

"A knife that won't come off."

"And the sovereign's crown is a shiny hat! This knife is magic. It's killed more people than you've ever met in your life."

"Magic? What's it do, slay dragons?"

The peddler laughed hard. "Oh, me boy, that's rich. That's a good laugh. 'Slay dragons!' Hooo! Dragonslaying knife it is!" His laughing got so loud that it turned into a hacking cough. It took him a full minute to recover. He sobered up before he continued.

"I couldn't sell that here, boy, even if I had one. Nobody 'round here's got any use for a dragon killing knife. The closest dragon's at least 100 leagues north, over the mountains. That one'll take more than a knife to put down, I'm telling you." The boy looked disappointed.

"Tell you what my friend. For giving me such a good laugh, I'll tell you what it will do. Something a lot more useful to folk such as yourself. Now this here's a keeper knife. You can tell an item's magic sometimes by looking at what else it does. See how the ring helps you hang onto the knife? The knife's like a ring for everything else you own. Wear the knife, and you can hang on to whatever else you own. Someone tries to pick your pocket, the knife'll put a stop to that. Someone breaks into your house while you're at home, the knife'll let you know about that real quick-like. It'll jump up and stick in whoever's trying to nick your turnips. You won't ever lose

that person then. You'll know where that one is until the ends of the earth. That's what that knife does."

The boy eyed it wonderingly. "How much?"

"You can't afford it, boy. I'm just showing it to you because you asked."

"How much?" He was stubborn.

"You've got money to buy magic knives, I suppose? Go on. I'm going to see if your lord will buy this trinket. It's not for the likes of you. I'd not even have shown it to you except you can't steal it from me."

"I've got some money. My father died last year and left me an inheritance. How much?"

He eyed the youth. "One hundred thousand gold pieces."

"Can you take it in gems?" he asked producing a handful of flawless emeralds from his pouch.

"Wha—Where'd you get money like that?"

"Told you, my father died."

"You father some adventurer?"

"Maybe."

"Your father wouldn't happen to have left you any more trinkets would he?"

The youth handed the pouch to the peddler. "I'm buying the knife. Give it to me."

"Hokay, boy! Let me check your baubles..." he pulled a jeweler's loupe out of a pocket and squinted at the jewels. Then he wiggled his fingers and muttered some words. The emeralds glowed for a second.

The peddler looked up at the peasant.

"They're for real. Okay, here's your knife. Don't know where you got all this money, but it's a pleasure doing business with you son."

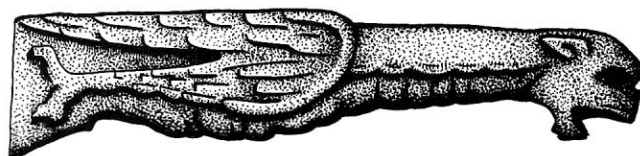
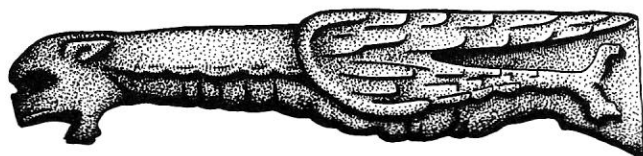
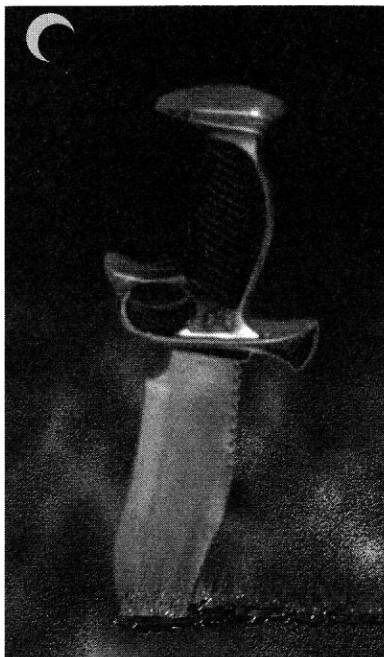
The peasant boy looked at his knife with wide, admiring eyes as he walked away. The peddler did the same with his new gems, hardly believing his good fortune.

"What a story!" the old blue dragon roared with laughter. "The peddler tricked you, friend, That was far too much to pay."

"Hardly," the green wyrm snorted. "This is excellent lair insurance. You won't be walking off with any of my Hargun Dynasty goblets this time, I wager."

"I didn't steal your stupid goblets."

"Well I didn't lose them. Besides, I had to buy it. I could hardly take the blasted thing from him. It'd still be circling me like an ioun stone if I had. I also wanted to make sure he wasn't putting dragon slaying ideas in anybody's head. Unlike you and your shenanigans to the north, I like my peace around these parts."



Sharkhunter

The sea god was pleased with his creations, great and small. He looked upon the great whales and was pleased at their grace and eloquence. He looked at the plankton and was pleased at its proliferation and nutritive value. He looked at the shark and was pleased at its neutrality and its cruelty. Like the sea god himself, the shark could be vicious, but was corrupted by no favoritism. The shark served its own hunger, just as the sea god had intended. All was good in the sea god's sight.

Then the sahuagin came. The sea god did not know the origin of this scourge, but he saw how they disrupted his perfect ocean. They slew whales for sport and despoiled the carcasses, leaving them to wash up on distant beaches. They cut and cultivated plankton, preventing it from growing freely. Worst of all, the sea devils tamed the sharks. Bending the creatures to their own wills, they perverted the clean, smooth killing nature of the shark, enslaving it. Sharks became lackeys and pets, stripped of their majesty and fearsomeness. The sea god was displeased.

In revenge, he battered the sahuagin with calamity and ruin for centuries. Poisoned fish in their diets, underwater siltstorms, violent underwater currents washing away entire cities—all of this and more did the sea god visit upon them for their temerity. The evil fish creatures resisted, but were no match for the sea god's might. He slowly began eliminating the perverters of his world... until the sahuagin called upon their own god.

The sea god had not even known the sea devils had a god of their own, but Sekola, the fearsome devil shark was sudden and mighty. She assaulted the sea god in his own demesne. She was driven back, of course, but the sea god was shaken. His creation warped, his own realm assaulted by a perverted form of it... what could be done to protect his beloved ocean from the evil interlopers?

The gods discussed matters among themselves. The

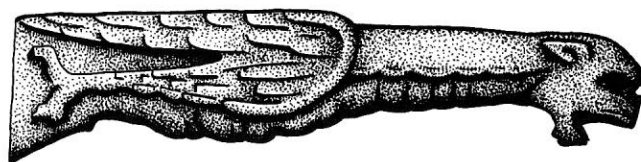
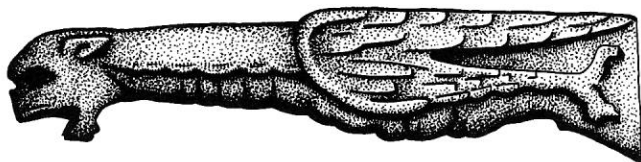
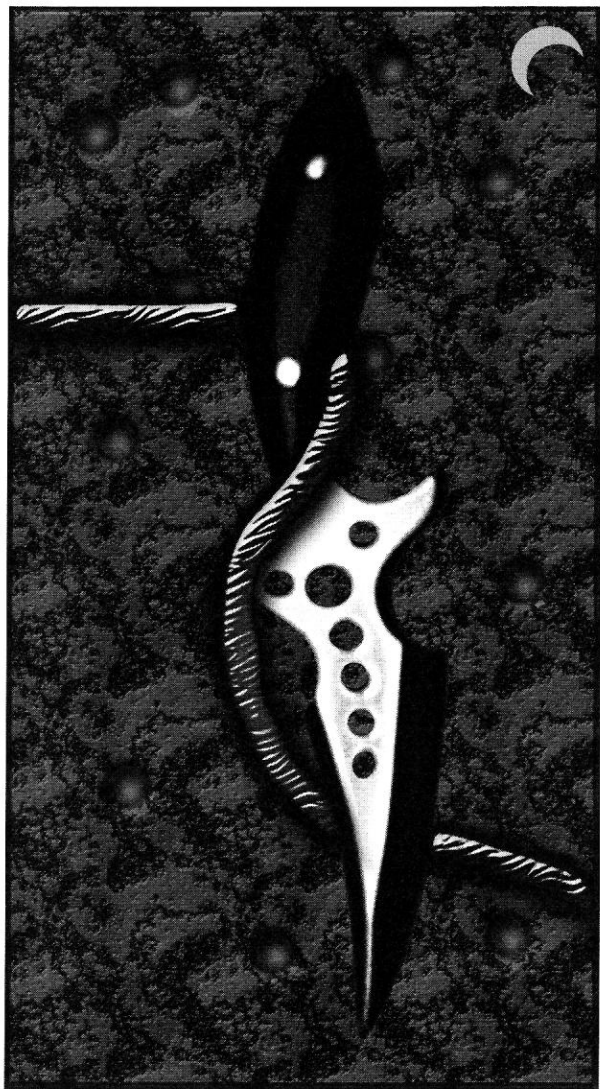
war gods called for retaliation. The trickster god proposed a series of barbed "gifts." The forge god, alone in his blackened corner, wondered aloud if both would not be possible. Finally, the Overgod spoke. "Sea King, you have not spent as much time with praying mortals as we. Gods do not do well to fight mortals directly, this much we have learned. Every creature that prays has its own god, and not even I have a full account of all the gods there may be. If you wish to punish a race of mortals, you are better served using other mortals as your weapon. Do

not bring war among the divine unless you are willing to risk your own existence, as well as your creation's." While the Overgod spoke, the forge god disappeared silently to his demesne.

The sea god pondered the Overgod's words for a time. During this time, the forge god's fires were so hot that mortals still tell of a year of no winter cold. When he emerged, the forge god went to the sea god. In his hand, he held a knife. "This is a gift that is retaliation, Sea King," he said. "This not for you to strike at the sea devils, but to arm their enemies. Your creation is forbidding to many mortals. They do not often venture into your realm because of its manifold dangers. Yet if you invite them, they will come. There, they will surely meet these sahuagin. There you will have your revenge." The forge god pressed his gift into the sea god's hand. The sea god smiled as an ocean of pearls.

Soon the knife began appearing on rocky cliffs, washed up on beaches, inside fishermen's catches. Along with the knives, came new stories of treasure

and great power found under the sea. Adventurers soon delved underwater armed with weapons that made swimming as easy as walking. When they encountered the sea devils and their trained sharks, the most mysterious things happened. The sharks turned on their former masters. The sahuagin were not defeated, but they were dealt a cruel when their own weapons were turned against them. A cruel, neutral blow.



The Rainbow Knife

The hidden mountain kingdom of Lamass was once a peaceful land, dominated by eleven folk and those who desired to live together in harmony. Lamass' idyllic existence continued for many years until a dark magi succeeded in penetrating the wards surrounding the verdant valley. His reason for doing so has been lost to history, but the breach in the barrier allowed numerous evil forces to enter the land. Chief among these were —for unknown reasons —incorporeal beings, notably wraiths and specters, and the valley elves found themselves beset by a foe they couldn't see or harm. Many fell to the invader's ghostly touch, but eventually the elven craftsmen forged enchanted weapons that could harm the invaders, though detecting them remained a problem. One attempt at a solution was the vicious weapon now known as the Rainbow Knife.

Named for its brightly colored handle, a swirl of colors, the knife was supernaturally sharp and contained enchantments intended to enhance its lethality, particularly against incorporeal foes. Furthermore, the spirits bound into the weapon "shared" their perceptions with the wielder, guiding him with rudimentary intelligence and allowing him to perceive, albeit dimly, the ghostly opponents. It proved effective and legend states that a number were forged, though the others have been destroyed or lost.

Unfortunately, the shift from a peaceful existence to a battle for their lives did not go well for the Elves of Lamass and they lost much of their jollity and *joi de vivre*, taking on a dour demeanor. Many came to believe that the safeguarding of their realm was worth any price, the ends justifying the means. They became darker, shifting toward a distinctly evil and xenophobic in outlook. Their weapons reflect-

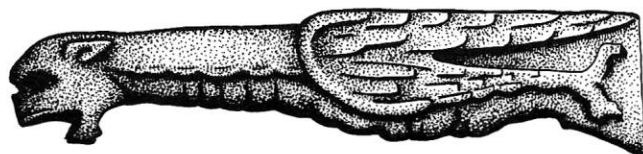
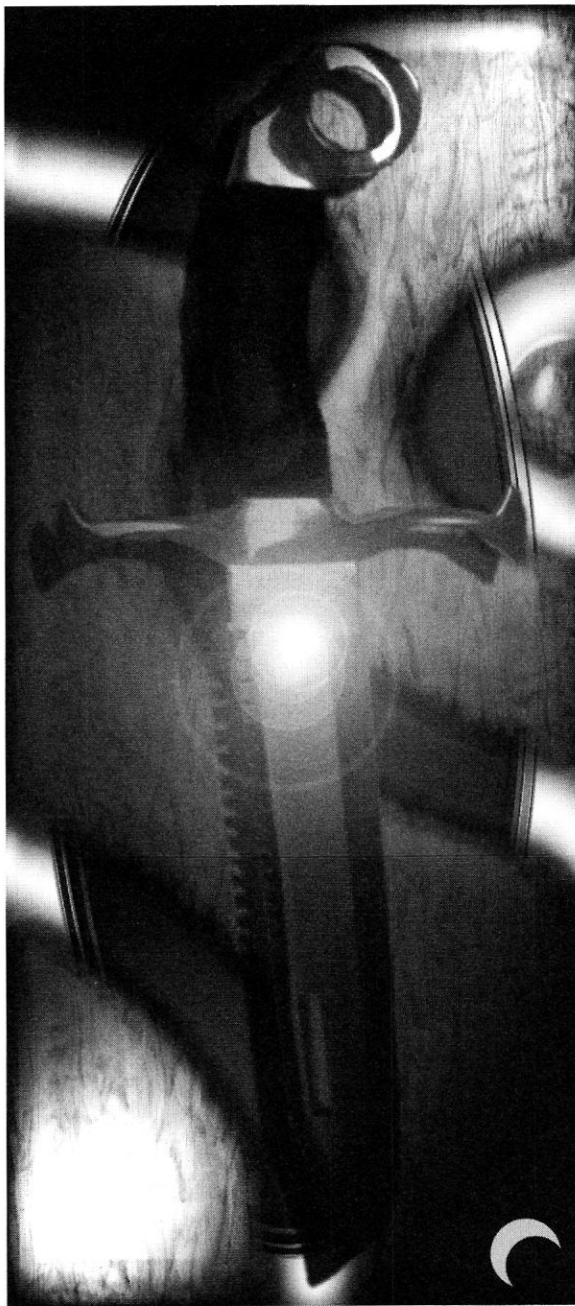
ed this change, taking on a brutal aspect, their spirits corrupted by the darkness. The Rainbow Knife, once a beacon of light against the encroaching darkness, became a tool of brutality and oppression, taking on a bloodthirstiness that prevented its being sheathed until it had drawn blood.

Ultimately, Lamass' hard-line stance proved counterproductive as the desire for individual self-preservation overcame the ideal of protecting the kingdom, the denizens of the valley eventually falling on each other in

a frenzied bloodletting. The survivors scattered and one, the elven warrior Sammeth, carried the Rainbow Knife into her exile. The alliance between the warrior and her weapon was fraught with conflict, the knife constantly pushing her to harm others. To some degree, this fitted in with Sammeth's aggressive personality, particularly during the time she spent as a pit fighter in Dullas, but she found herself constantly on the move, keeping one step ahead of the authorities that sought her for a string of brutal slayings. Eventually, on a voyage from Mastique to Clef, Sammeth rid herself of the cursed weapon by casting it into the ocean.

Unlike lesser weapons, the Rainbow Knife did not passively accept its fate, instead manipulating marine creatures to move it toward shore. Eventually, it was able to contact a sea-wraith, Kesh, who though initially unwilling to approach a weapon designed to slay its kind, found it could manipulate the weapon and saw all the possibilities that afforded. For the last few months Kesh has used the Rainbow Knife to intimidate his pack, binding them to his will, as well as to terrorize fishermen who stray into "his" domain. The knife, however, regards Kesh as nothing more than a means to an end —it wants to return to the land and to proper bloodletting, and will seek to abandon the sea-wraith in favor of a more suitable

bearer should the opportunity arise.



GAME STATISTICS

Every sword presented in *Swords of Power* is completely compatible with any d20 System game. The game statistics for each sword and its current owners, protectors, or pursuers are listed here:

SWORD OF MAGNIFICENCE (from pages 6-9)

Longsword +2, +5 vs. outsiders

Succubus (Tanar'ri): SZ M (Outsider); Hit Dice: 6d8 +6; hp 33; Init: +1 (Dex); Speed: 30/50; AC: 20 (+1 Dex, +9 natural); Atk: 2 claws +7 melee (1d3 +1); Reach: 5 x 5; Face: 5; Special attacks: Spell-like abilities, energy drain, summon tanar'ri; Special Qualities: Damage reduction 20/+2, SR 12, Tanar'ri qualities, alternate form, tongues; SV: Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +7; Abilities: Str 13, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 20; Skills: Bluff +11, Concentration +7, Disguise +11, Escape artist +7, Hide +7, Knowledge (Arcane) +9, Listen +16, Move Silently +7, Ride +7, Search +9, Spot +16; Feats: Dodge, Mobility; AL CE. Challenge rating: 9

Vrock (Tanar'ri): SZ L (Outsider); Hit Dice: 8d8 +24; hp 60; Init: +2 (Dex); Speed: 30/50; AC: 25 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +14 natural); Atk: 2 claws +11 melee (1d8 +4), bite +9 melee (1d6+2), 2 rakes + 9 melee (1d4+2); Reach: 5 x 5; Face: 10; Special attacks: Spell-like abilities, spores, screech, dance of ruin, summon tanar'ri; Special Qualities: Damage reduction 20/+2, SR 22, tanar'ri qualities; SV: Fort +9, Ref +8, Will +8; Abilities: Str 19, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 12; Skills: Concentration +14, Hide +9, Knowledge (any one) +12, Listen +13, Move Silently +13, Search +13, Sense Motive +13, Spellcraft +12, Spot +12; Feats: Cleave, Multiattack, Power Attack; AL CE. Challenge rating: 13

Nalfeshnee (Tanar'ri): SZ H (Outsider); Hit Dice: 11d8 +44; hp 93; Init: +1 (Dex); Speed: 30/40; AC: 28 (-2 size, +1 Dex, +19 natural); Atk: Bite +15 melee (2d4+6), 2 claws +13 melee (1d4 +3); Reach: 10 x 10; Face: 15; Special attacks: Spell-like abilities, smite, summon tanar'ri; Special Qualities: Damage reduction 20/+2, SR 24, tanar'ri qualities, know alignment, see invisibility; SV: Fort +11, Ref +8, Will +13; Abilities: Str 23, Dex 13, Con 19, Int 22, Wis 22, Cha 16; Skills: Bluff +17, Concentration +18, Diplomacy +17, Hide +7, Knowledge (arcana) +16, Listen +26, Move Silently +15, Scry +19, Search +20, Sense Motive +19, Spellcraft +20, Spot +26; Feats: Cleave, Multiattack, Power Attack; AL CE. Challenge rating: 16

LEGACY BLADE (from pages 10-13)

Short sword +4, *Soultrap* (gains a new ability each time a wielder is killed while using it, ability gained based on actions and personality of dead wielder); intelligent (Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 9; semi-empathy; chaotic neutral; *meld into stone* 2/day, wielder has free use of *Endurance**, *spider climb* at will*, *obscuring mist* at will*, *alter self* 3/day*, *dispel magic* 2/day*, *scrying* 1/day*; Ego 13); cursed (draw-back: 5% chance of weapon losing a random ability marked with a * each time it is used to kill a dwarf).

Scena Shafftholm, Dwarf, 9th-Level Expert: SZ M

(Dwarf); Hit Dice: 9d6; hp 54; Init: 0; AC: 16; Atk: master-work battleaxe +9/+4 melee (1d8+2/ x3 crit) ; AL LG; SV: Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +6, Special Abilities: Dwarven Traits; Abilities: Str 14, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 13; Skills and Feats: Appraise +15, Craft (armorsmithing) +17, Craft (blacksmithing) +17, Craft (weaponsmithing) +17, Intuit Direction +12, Knowledge (engineering) +15, Knowledge (history) +15, Profession (shopkeeper) +12, Sense Motive +12; Endurance, Great Fortitude, Martial Weapon Proficiency (battleaxe), Shield Proficiency.

Macer Hatebearer, Human, 7th-Level Fighter: SZ M

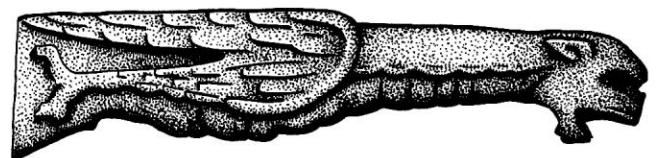
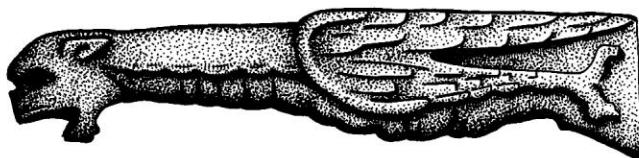
(Human); Hit Dice: 7d10; hp 59; Init: 4; AC: 16; Atk: Legacy Blade +15/+10 melee (1d6+9/19-20 x2 crit) ; AL CN; SV: Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +3; Abilities: Str 17, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14; Skills and Feats: Climb +6, Hide +2, Jump +6, Listen +4, Move Silently +2, Spot +4, Wilderness Lore +4; Blind-Fight, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Track, Weapon Focus (short sword), Weapon Specialization (short sword).

SINGING SWORD OF CAMELOT (from pages 14-17)

Short sword +3, +5 vs. acknowledged foes of Camelot; When used in the knighting ceremony, this weapon permanently increases by +3 a random statistic of the person being knighted. When drawn in battle, the sword sings a war chant, causing fear in all foes. As a result, the user gains a +3 bonus to his AC. The sword can never be broken, and its user's sword arm can never be entrapped. If its user dies in battle, the weapon teleports itself back to the small stone pedestal at the heart of castle Camelot.

Red Knight, 15th-level Fighter: SZ M (Human): Hit Dice:

15d10 +30, hp 124; Init: 5 (Dex, Improved Init., -3 armor enhancement); Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 29 (+1 Dex with armor enhancement factored in, +12 plate mail with +4 magical bonus, +6 shield with +4 magical bonus); Atk: +4 Longsword +23/+18/+13 melee; Dmg: Longsword +4 (1d8 +9 / 16-20 / x3); Special Abilities: red magical armor won't allow critical hits to effect the wearer, the armor



cancels out weight penalties for movement purposes; the armor and shield add to his saving throws; AL CN; SV: Fort +19, Ref +19, Will +13; Str 19, Dex 18, Con 15, Int 10, Will 10, Cha 10; Skills and Feats: Craft (Blacksmithing) +18, Handle Animal +8, Jump +14, Ride +22, Ambidexterity, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Mounted Combat.

ABSOLUTE (from pages 18-21)

Dagger +4, vorpal, wounding; intelligent (Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 8, semi empathy, *finger of death*, 100-ft. range, DC 17, special purpose: defeat/slay all, slay living); cursed neutral evil blade (character using Absolute to kill must keep track on a separate track how many times he slay an opponent with Absolute. Every 10 victims, the player must make a d100 roll. If he rolls higher than the number of kills the character has made, there is no effect. If he rolls lower, the character picks up a 2% chance/day that he will feel compelled to attack the nearest random creature. Should this percentage reach 50%, using Absolute becomes an addiction. The owner will attack someone once/day until he dies. Even a *wish* spell cannot overcome this addiction. At any point up to the time he reaches 50%, the owner may make a Will save versus DC 20 to give up the weapon.)

PASHYMYARRA, CEREMONIAL BLADE OF MEMORY AND WISDOM (from pages 22-25)

Short sword +2, Intelligent (Int 17, Wis 18, Cha 14, Ego 19); neutral good; light 50' radius on command, duration permanent unless cancelled at will.

Only a king or queen who has undergone a bonding ceremony to the sword can tap the sword's powers. If used in combat, the sword will shatter, killing all in a 50-foot radius except the ruler to whom it is bonded. Only the ruler and his family, his heirs, and members of the wizard class may touch the sword; all others who do so suffer 2d4 damage. If exposed to sunlight, the sword sends out blazing rays of light, causing blindness to all within 50 yards for 2-24 hours (2% chance blindness is permanent, but may be cured magically). Exposure to sunlight also causes the sword to heat up as per the heat metal spell, lasting one hour per minute of exposure to the sun.

When in contact with the sword, the ruler to whom it is attuned may cause the sword to record events within the same room (or within 25 yards outdoors). By concentrating while touching the sword, the ruler can experience any sequence of events recorded by the sword. Anyone attempting to access the memories of the sword other than the attuned ruler will feel a jolt of searing heat and electricity and will be killed by the blade in 2-6 rounds.

The only salvation for such a victim is for the ruler, a member of his family, or a wizard to remove the blade from the victim's hands before death occurs.

SWORD OF MERELLIS (from pages 26-29)

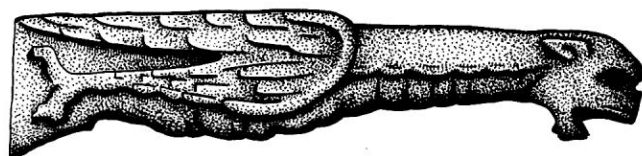
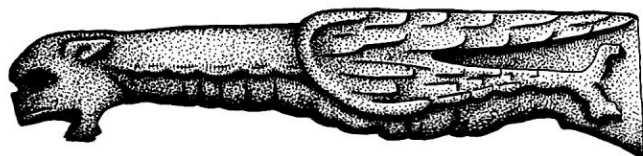
Holy Avenger bastard sword: This sword functions as a holy avenger only for Knights of the Shining Sword and not for normal paladins. In addition, a Knight wielder and his mount may engage in battle for 96 hours without eating or sleeping, and without any ill effects as a result. At the end of that time, wielder and steed must eat and rest as if following a typical day of battle, or be incapacitated with exhaustion for 1d4 days.

The sword grants a +2 bonus to hit and to damage for all friendly troops within a 100-yard radius. Even exhausted friendly troops within this radius may fight for 6 hours without feeling the effects of hunger or fatigue, but at the end of this period (or upon leaving the sword's radius), the full effects of hunger and fatigue set in.

WIND OF DISCORD (from pages 30-33)

Chaotic longsword +5; intelligent (Int 19, Wis 16, Cha 13; speech; chaotic neutral; item can Sense Motive [10 ranks], wielder has free use of evasion, *haste* [wielder only, 10 rounds] 1/day; defeat/slay lawful outsiders, *confusion* [DC 14] for 2d6 rounds; Ego 20); cursed (drawback: character now bears an identifying mark [tattoo]; requirement: character must be chaotic).

Taron Lawbreaker, male 12th-Level Cleric of Ayera: CR 12; SZ Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 12d8; hp 61; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 22 (touch 15, flat-footed 20 [+2 Dex, +5 armor, +2 enhancement, +3 deflection]), Atk +17/+12 melee (1d6+7 plus 2d6 chaotic/19-20, *wind of discord*); SA Turn undead; SQ *Freedom of movement* 12 rounds/day, Trickery Domain, Travel Domain; AL CG; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +13; Str 15, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 16, Wis 20, Cha 18. Height 5 ft., 9 in.; weight 165 lbs.; Skills and Feats: Concentration +15, Diplomacy +21, Knowledge (religion) +18, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Sense Motive +12, Spellcraft +18, Spot +7; Alertness, Blind-fight, Dodge, Martial Weapon Proficiency (short sword), Spell Penetration, Weapon Focus (short sword); Possessions: +2 *glamored breastplate*, *necklace of adaptation*, *potion of cat's grace*, *ring of protection* +3, *wand of searing light*; Spells (cast 6/ 7+1/ 5+1/ 5+1/ 4+1/ 4+1/ 2+1): 0—*detect magic* (2), *light*, *resistance* (2), *read magic*; 1—*comprehend languages*, *deathwatch*, *detect law*, *divine favor*, *endure elements*, *protection from law*, *random action*, (domain) *change self*; 2—*aid*, *darkness*, *delay poison*, *summon monster II*, *undetected alignment*, (domain) *invisibility*; 3—*bestow curse*, *contagion*, *dispel magic*, *remove curse*, *summon monster III*, (domain) *fly*; 4—*dismissal*, *lesser planar ally*, *sending*, *tongues*, (domain) *confu-*





sion; 5—dispel law, flame strike, righteous might, spell resistance, (domain) teleport; 6—banishment, planar ally, (domain) mislead.

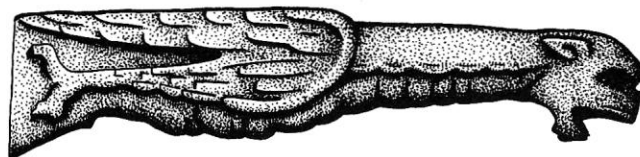
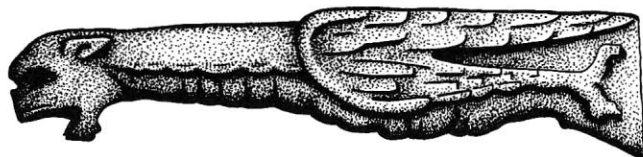
DEMONHUNTER (from pages 34-37)

Holy bane (evil outsiders) dagger of wounding +4; intelligent (Int 23, Wis 14, Cha 20; speech, telepathy, read all languages, read magic; lawful good; wielder has free use of Combat Reflexes, Expertise, Improved Initiative, wielder has free use of uncanny dodge as a 5th-level Barbarian, wielder does not need to sleep, *cat's grace* 2/day, *heal* 1/day, *true seeing* at will; *defeat/slay evil outsiders, true resurrection* on wielder 1 time; Ego 43); cursed (requirement: character must have at least 1 level as a paladin, character must be lawful good).

Zalika: male 10th-level fighter/6th-level blackguard: CR 18; SZ: Medium-sized outsider (chaotic, elf, evil); HD 10d10 plus 8d10; hp 118; Init +5; Spd 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (aver-

age); AC 27; Atk +28/+23/+18/+13 melee (1d8+13 plus 1d6 fire, +5 flaming burst longsword), +22 melee (1d6+6, bite), +17 melee (1d4+3, 2 claws), +24/+19/+14/+9 ranged (1d8+6, Mankiller); SA command undead, poison use, smite good, sneak attack +1d6, spell-like abilities; SQ aura of despair, dark blessing, darkvision 60 ft., detect good at will, immunity to poison, elemental resistances; AL CE; SV Fort +19, Ref +19, Will +15; Str 22, Dex 20, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 14. Height 6 ft. 4 in., weight 190 lbs.; Skills and Feats: Bluff +8, Concentration +8, Disguise +8, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (planes) +7, Ride +15, Spot +9; Alertness, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (composite longbow), Improved Critical (longsword), Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Sunder, Weapon Focus (composite longbow), Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (longsword).

Special Attacks: spell-like abilities: 3/day—darkness, poison, unholy aura; 1/day—blasphemy, contagion, desecrate, horrid wilting, unhallow, unholy blight.



Special Qualities: elemental resistances: acid, cold, electricity, and fire resistance 20.

Possessions: *Flaming burst longsword* +5, *Mankiller* (human bane mighty composite longbow +3 [+3 Str bonus]), +4 *light fortification leather armor*, *cloak of resistance* +5, +3 *arrow deflecting large steel shield*, *ring of chameleon power*, *ring of mind shielding*, 2 potions of *cure moderate wounds*.

Spells Prepared (2/1, 6th-level caster, base DC 11+spell level): 1st—*cure light wounds* (2); 2nd—*cure moderate wounds*.

Xethes: CR 4; Large magical beast (horse); HD 10d8+30; hp 81; Init +1; Spd 50 ft.; AC 19; Atk +11 melee (1d6+5, 2 hooves); +6 melee (1d4+2, bite); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 10 ft./5 ft.; SA smite good; SQ blood bond, cold and fire resist 15, damage reduction 5/+2, darkvision 60 ft., empathic link, improved evasion, scent, share spells, speak with blackguard; SR 20; AL CE; SV: Fort +15, Ref +8, Will +6; Str 21, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 8, Wis 13, Cha 6; Skills and Feats: Listen +7, Spot +7; Possessions: horse-shoes of a zephyr.

SOULEYE (from pages 38-41)

Bastard sword +5; intelligent (Int 25, Cha 18, Wis 16; lawful neutral; *feblemind* and *tongues at will*; *greater scrying*, *mind blank*, *spell turning* and *vision* 1/day; *speech* and *telepathy*; ego 24); the blade deals 2d6 additional fire damage on all successful hits; sword bestows a +10 bonus to the owner's Armor Class and all resistances; owner gains +12 levels in all Charisma and Wisdom-based skills; the owner can telepathically read the thoughts of any creature within line-of sight; all spells cast by the owner are cast two levels higher than normal; cursed (there is a 40% chance that every spell the owner casts while in possession of the weapon will be made permanent, if so possible).

Dalan the Younger, 20th-level fighter/20th-level wizard: SZ M (half-elf); Hit Dice: 20d10 +20d4 +40; hp 160; Init: +2 (Dex); Speed: 30; AC: 24 (+2 Dex, +8 scale mail +4, +10 souleye); Atk: longsword +5, +29 melee (1d8+9); Reach: 5 x 5; Face: 5; Special attacks: Spells as 20th-level wizard; SV: Fort +24, Ref +18, Will +25; Abilities: Str 18, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 20, Wis 17, Cha 16; Skills: Alchemy +25, Appraise +15, Bluff +34, Climb +14, Concentration +32, Craft (weaponsmith) +15, Diplomacy +24, Gather Information +31, Innuendo +24, Intimidate +24, Knowledge (any 4) +20, Listen +19, Sense Motive +23, Speak Language (any 4) +15, Spellcraft +25, Spot +24; Feats: Any (37 total); AL LN.

Challenge rating: 35

GOBLINSLAYER, THE SWORD OF AMERIC THE TALL (from pages 42-45)

Longsword +2, +5 vs. goblins or goblinkin, *goblinfire*; when even the blade strikes against goblin-fashioned metal in combat a shower of sparks spreads in a four-yard-diameter sphere. These sparks are harmless to anything but flammable objects of goblin manufacture, which immediately ignite in normal flame. Other flammable objects not made by goblins are not ignited, nor are inflammable goblin items.

BLOOD-DEW SWORD (from pages 46-47)

Longsword +3, +5 vs. *disloyal subjects*, *true-sovereign sense*; cursed against any but a true sovereign, which it automatically and accurately detects at all times. Anyone other than a true sovereign who wields the sword in combat suffers intense heat damage: 1d8 in the first round, 2d8 in the next, and so on. The wielder can only let go of the sword on a Will test (DC 28). Any true sovereign can wield the sword without any heat damage.

King Nolder, 10th level Cleric of the Sword: SZ M

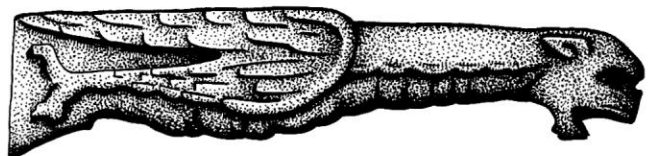
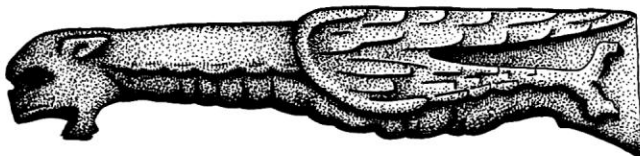
(Human): Hit Dice: 10d6; hp 51; Init: 0; Speed: 30; AC 10; Atk: Blood-Dew sword +11/+6 melee, (1d8/ x3 crit); SV: Fort +3, Ref +10, Will +9; Special Abilities: Spells 6 -0 level, 6 -1st level, 6 -2nd level, 4 -3rd level, 4 -4th level; Abilities: Str 15, Dex 11, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 12; Skills: Concentration +14, Heal +15, Knowledge (Religion) +14, Spellcraft +14; Feats: Alertness, Combat Casting, Endurance, Great Fortitude, Improved Unarmed Strike; AL LG

FAITHFUL LIGHTNING (from pages 48-49)

This huge greatsword can be used as a melee weapon only by a warrior with a Strength rating of 16 or better. In the hands of such a person, it serves as a *short sword* +3.

Whenever the sword is drawn from its scabbard in an outdoor setting, it summons storm clouds above the wielder, from which it charges itself with electrical energy. This process takes 30 minutes to complete. The weapon can hold this charge for up to four hours, during which time the wielder can use it to cast the following spells as if he were a 12th-level sorcerer: *shocking grasp* 6x/period; *shatter* 3x/period; *lightning bolt* 4x/period; and *chain lightning* 1x/period. These spells erupt from the blade's tip.

One side effect of the charging process is that any metal upon the wielder's person begins to glow with a pent-up static charge, and any fur, hair, or loose clothing upon the wielder bristles and crackles with static. (On the battlefield, this makes the user very visible, especially under a clouded sky.) This effect lasts until all spells have been discharged from the weapon or the four-hour time period expires, whichever comes first.



BLOODWELL (from pages 50-51)

Short sword +3, *Sustenance* (as ring); intelligent (Int 11, Wis 18, Cha 15; empathy; neutral; *calm animals* at lvl 12 at will*, *lesser restoration* 3/day*, *meld into stone* 3/day*, *flame strike* at lvl 12 2/day*, *tree stride* 2/day*); a purpose weapon to defeat/slay vampires, target affected by searing light at lvl 12; Ego 22); cursed (drawback: wielder takes 1d3+1 hp of damage each time abilities marked * are used).

Bloodwell is generally found in the hands of a level 6-9 Duski druid hunting a vampire. Duski druids use short swords instead of scimitars with no penalty, and they take 1 hp of damage per spell level for each spell they cast. A Duski druid must be able to draw his own blood to cast spells, though other druidic abilities are used as normal.

SPIRIT OF THE HORSE (from pages 52-53)

Scimitar +5, *Ruler's Blade* (wielder has free use of Leadership with a Leadership Score of 20); cursed (drawback: wielder becomes selfishly possessive of weapon).

Harabin of the Dashimi, Human Chieftain, 12th-level Fighter: SZ M (Human); Hit Dice: 12d10; hp 97; Init: 8; AC: 17; Atk: masterwork scimitar +17/+12/+7 melee (1d6+5/ 16-20 x2 crit) or mighty composite short bow +16/+11/+6 ranged (1d6+2/ x3 crit) ; AL N; SV: Fort +11, Ref +8, Will +6; Abilities: Str 16, Dex 18, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 16; Skills and Feats: Diplomacy +5, Handle Animal +13, Heal +4, Intimidate +5, Intuit Direction +4, Knowledge (local) +3, Listen +6, Ride +18, Sense Motive +4, Spot +6, Wilderness Lore +4; Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Endurance, Improved Critical (scimitar), Improved Initiative, Leadership, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Trample, Weapon Focus (scimitar), Weapon Specialization (scimitar).

Light War Horse: CR1; SZ L (animal); Hit Dice: 3d8+9; hp 27; Init: +1 (Dex); Spd: 60; AC 14 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +4 natural); Atk: 2 hooves +4 (1d4+3) melee and bite -1 (1d3+1) melee; Face 5' x 10'; Reach 5'; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +2; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 6; Skills and Feats: Listen +7, Spot +7.

TALKING SWORD OF STRENGTH (from pages 54-55)

Longsword +3/+5 *versus Green Races creatures*; The weapon acts like a Chime of Opening twice a day. The weapon gives its owner strength of 19 as long as it is touching or belted to its user. Talking neutral weapon (Intelligence 11, Wisdom 11, Charisma 11, Ego 8); Sense magic items in a 30-foot radius.

DragonGoblin: SZ S (Goblinoid); Hit Dice 1d8 +3, hp 7;

Init: +3 (Dex, +2 natural); Speed: 40 ft.; AC: 17 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +2 natural, +3 dragon hide); Atk: 1 claw +2 melee or 1 javelin +3 ranged; Dmg: Claw 1d10 or javelin 1d6; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.; Special Qualities: Darkvision 90 ft., special immunity to black dragon breath; AL CE; SV: Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 9, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 9; Skills and Feats: Hide +7, Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Spot +4; Alertness.

See the *Slave Pits of the Goblin King* Green Races adventure module for more details on DragonGoblins and their ways.

Ren's Smarter Cousin, Lawrence, 9th-level Rogue: SZ M (human); Hit Dice: 9d6 +9; hp 56; Init: 4 (Dex); Speed: 30; AC: 14 (+4 Dex); Atk: two short swords +7/+2, war darts +10/+5 or throwing daggers +10/+5; Dmg: short sword 1d6 (19-20/ x2 crit); war dart 1d4 (x2 crit); throwing dagger 1d4 (19-20/ x2 crit); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5ft.; AL CN; SV: Fort +5, Ref +12, Will +2; Str 12, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 13, Will 9, Cha 15; Skills and Feats: Balance +16, Disable Device +13, Disguise +14, Escape Artist +16, Move Silently +16, Open Lock +16, Pick Pocket +16, Search +13; Ambidexterity, Blind-fight, Dodge, Lightning Reflexes, Two-Weapon Fighting.

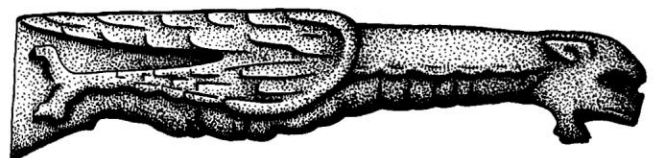
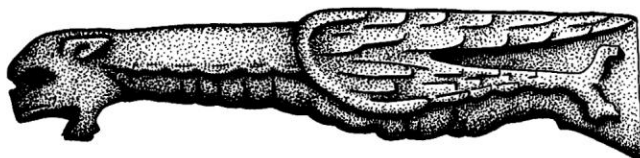
TELEPATHIC BLADE OF DRAGONKIND (from pages 56-57)

Vorpal longsword +3/+5 *versus dragons*; The blade's purpose is to defeat/slay the enemies of the city of Dragonkind. Telepathic lawful good weapon (Intelligence 11, Wisdom 15, Charisma 11, Ego 19). The weapon magically causes sorcerer spells to rebound upon the caster. The weapon gives its user the following skill bonuses: Balance +7, Jump +7, Move Silently +7. The weapon gives its user the following Feats: Weapon Specialization, Weapon Focus, Weapon Finesse, Power Attack, Cleave, and Great Cleave. The weapon senses evil and its power in a 100-yard radius.

Dalton the Hero, 5th-level Fighter: SZ M (human); Hit Dice: 5d10 +20; hp 67; Init: 3 (Dex); Speed: 30; AC: 13 (+3 Dex); Atk: Club +9; Dmg: Club 1d6 +4 (x2 crit); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5ft. ; AL LG; SV: Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 19, Dex 17, Con 19, Int 10, Will 10, Cha 10; Skills and Feats: Craft (weaponsmithing) +8, Ride +11, Swim +11; Blind-fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge.

DRAGONHEART BLADE (from pages 58-59)

Longsword +4; Purpose to defeat/slay all nonDragonElves. Special affect that permanently polymorphs the wielder into a DragonElf over the course of one year's use. Telepathic neutral evil weapon, (Intelligence 17, Wisdom 18, Charisma 19, Ego 20).



Telepathy 100 ft. range

Shordan Darkheart (a Tal-e-dan), Corperlus of the Tenth Threecian Guards: SZ: M (shapechanger); Hit Dice: 7d8 +7; hp 35; Init: +5 (Dex, Improved Init.); Speed: 40 ft.; AC: 17 (+1 Dex, +6 natural); Atk: 2 slams +4 melee or by weapon type; Dmg: Slam 1d8 +1 or by weapon type; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft./ Special Attacks: Detect thoughts; Special Qualities: Alter self, immune to elf magical spells; AL CE; SV: Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +6; Str 13, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 17; Skills and Feats: Bluff +13, Disguise +13, Listen +13, Sense Motive +13, Spot +13; Alertness, Dodge, CR:3, Treasure: None.

SWORD OF CHALLENGE (from pages 60-61)

Bastard sword +1; Globe of Invulnerability. Purpose to Defeat/Slay all undead. Hold Monster (DC 14) for 1d4 rounds. Intelligent, empathic, lawful good weapon (Intelligence 10, Wisdom 10, Charisma 10, Ego 12). Wielder has the use of Improved Initiative. Find traps at will. Slay undead (DC 15)

Vampire King of the Northern Hemisphere: SZ M (Undead); Hit Dice: 5d12; hp 60; Init: +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Init.); Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 25 (+3 Dex, +6 natural, +4 masterwork chain shirt, +2 large shield); Atk: Slam +11 melee (or masterwork bastard sword +13 melee); or masterwork short bow +9 ranged; Dmg: Slam 1d6 +6 and energy drain; bastard sword 1d10 + 11; or short bow 1d6; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.; Special Attacks: Charm, energy drain, blood drain, children of the night, create spawn; Special Qualities: Undead, damage reduction 15/+1, cold and electricity resistance 20, gaseous form, spider climb, alternate form, fast healing 5, vampire weaknesses; AL CE; SV: Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +4; Str 22, Dex 17, Con —, Int 17, Wis 16, Cha 13; Skills and Feats: Bluff +9, Climb +10, Hide +11, Listen +17, Move Silently +11, Ride +11, Search +9, Sense Motive +11, Spot +17; Alertness, Blight-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Weapon focus (bastard sword), Weapon Specialization (bastard sword).

SWORD OF JUSTICE (from pages 62-63)

Longsword +3, lawful good, empathy, with free use of the Sunder feat, and wielder can see invisible at will. Passwall Extraordinary power. Holy Avenger sword with the purpose to defend the weak, does an extra 2d6 points of bonus holy damage against all evil aligned beings. Intelligence 13, Wisdom 16, Charisma 16, Ego 19. The weapon casts the *faerie fire* spell on all foes bent on harming its wielder.

Black Paladin, 9th-level Paladin: SZ M (Human); Hit Dice: 9d10 +9, hp 89; Init: +0 (Dex, -3 armor enhancement); Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 29 (+0 Dex with armor enhancement factored in, +11 plate mail with +3 magical bonus, +5 shield with +3 magical bonus); Atk: +3 longsword +15/+10 melee; Dmg: longsword +4 (1d8 +6 / 16-20 / x3); Special Abilities: black +3 magical armor won't allow critical hits to affect the wearer; the armor cancels out weight penalties for movement purposes; the armor and +3 shield add to the user's saving throws, Detect Aura of Evil, Divine Grace, Lay on Hands, Divine Health, Aura of Courage, Smite Evil, Remove Disease (3 times a week), Turn Undead, Code of Conduct, Spells 2 1st-level, 1 2nd-level; AL LG; SV: Fort +17, Ref +17, Will +18; Str 17, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 10, Will 18, Cha 17; Skills and Feats: Diplomacy +15, Handle Animal +9, Heal +10, Ride +15; Focus (longsword), Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Mounted Combat, Weapon Finesse (longsword).

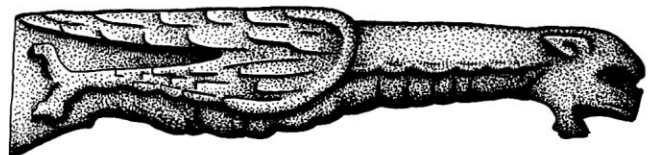
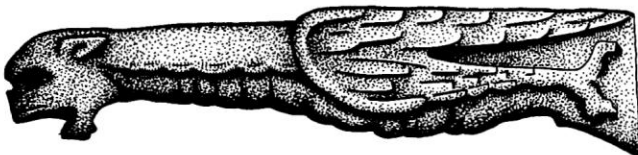
Clive, Bandit Leader, 9th-level Rogue: SZ M (human); Hit Dice: 13d6 +52; hp 110; Init: 4 (Dex); Speed: 30; AC: 19 (+4 Dex, +5 chain mail); Atk: short sword +13/+8, or throwing daggers +13/+8; Dmg: short sword 1d6 (19-20/ x2 crit); throwing dagger 1d4 (19-20/ x2 crit); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5ft.; Special Abilities: Ring of Invisibility, Sneak Attack +7d6, Crippling Strike, Improved Evasion; AL CN; SV: Fort +8, Ref +12, Will +5; Str 132, Dex 18, Con 18, Int 13, Will 8, Cha 18; Skills and Feats: Diplomacy +20, Disable Device +16, Hide +20, Move Silently +20, Pick Pocket +20, Sense Motive +15, Spot +15; Ambidexterity, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Critical (short sword), Iron Will.

CONTESTING SWORD (from pages 64-65)

Vorpal, unholy avenger bastard sword +2; Intelligence, Speech, Lawful Evil alignment. Wielder can sense motive and detect magic. The sword and its wielder are immune to the effects of acid. Wielder can be hasted by the sword. Purpose weapon designed to defend Gorn at all costs. Special purpose weapon able to disintegrate (DC 16). Intelligence 18, Wisdom 7, Charisma 17, Ego 21

Gorn's Specially Made Shield Guardian: SZ L (Construct); Hit Dice: 15d10; hp 150; Init: +0; Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 27 (-1 size, +18 natural); Atk: Slam +16/+11/+6 melee; Dmg: Slam 1d8 +9; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. /10 ft.; Special Attacks: Spell storing; Special Qualities: Construct, fast healing 5, shield other, guard, find master; AL N; SV: Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 22, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1.

Gorn the Sorcerer, 10th-Level: SZ M (Human); Hit Dice 11d4 +33; hp 70; Init.: 3 (Dex); Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 13 (+3



Dex); Atk: Spells: Dmg: Spells: Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.; Special Attacks: Spell use 6-0 level, 7-1st, 7-2nd, 7-3rd, 5-4th, 3-5th; AL LE; SV: Fort +6, Ref +8, Will +5; Str 8, Dex 17, Con 17, Int 19, Wis 7, Cha 17; Skills and Feats: Concentration +16, Craft (Blacksmithing) +17, Craft (weaponsmithing) +17, Knowledge (arcana) +17, Spellcraft +17; Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Leadership, Lightning Reflexes.

SWORD OF DEATH (from pages 66-67)

Longsword +1; Intelligent blade with speech and a neutral alignment. Wielder has free use of the Uncanny Dodge and Evasion feats, and he does not need to sleep. Wielder has cat's grace. The weapon performs a critical hit on 15-20. The weapon also does the wielder's Constitution score in extra damage with every successful strike. The neutral weapon has the intelligent purpose of defeat/slay all others. The weapon has the special purpose power of slay living (DC 15). Intelligence 20, Wisdom 20, Charisma 20, Ego 30

ANKLESPLITTER, THE EARTH SWORD (from pages 68-69)

Longsword +3; Intelligent, empathic, chaotic good sword. Wielder does not need to breathe and the wielder has spider climb. Wielder has a shield spell working when the weapon is drawn. The weapon's purpose is to defeat/slay fire giants. The weapon's special purpose is to cause fear (DC 14) on a successful hit for 1d4 rounds. The weapon can summon an earth elemental once a day, and this creature fights willingly alongside the wielder of the sword. Intelligence 10, Wisdom 10, Charisma 10, Ego 18

Stonebiter the Dwarf, 5th level Fighter: SZ M (Dwarf); Hit Dice: 5d10 +20; hp 67; Init: 3 (Dex); Speed: 15 ft. (scale mail); base 20 ft.; AC: 16 (+4 scale mail, +2 large shield); Atk: dwarven waraxe +8 melee; Dmg: waraxe 1d10 +3; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.; Special Attacks: Dwarven traits; Special Qualities: Dwarven traits; AL CG; SV: Fort +10, Ref +3, Will +1; Str 17, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 18, Will 10, Cha 9; Skills and Feats: Craft (armorsmithing) +12, Craft (blacksmithing) +12, Craft (gemcutting) +12, Craft (locksmithing) +12, Craft (trapmaking) +12, Craft (weaponsmithing) +12; Endurance, Exotic Weapon proficiency (dwarven waraxe).

Helga, Fire Giant Queen: SZ L (Fire Giant); Hit Dice: 15d8 +75; hp 180; Init: -1 (Dex); Speed: 30 ft. (chain mail); base 40 ft.; AC: 21 (-1 size, -1 Dex, +8 natural, +5 chain mail); Atk: Huge great sword +20/+15/+10 melee; or rock +10/+5/+0 ranged; Dmg: Huge great sword 2d8 +15; or rock 2d6 +10; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. / 10 ft.; Special Attacks: Rock throwing; Special Qualities: Rock catching;

fire subtype; AL LE; SV: Fort +14, Ref +4, Will +5; Str 31, Dex 9, Con 21, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11; Skills and Feats: Climb +11, Jump +11, Spot +7; Cleave, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Sunder.

STEELSHADOW (from pages 70-71)

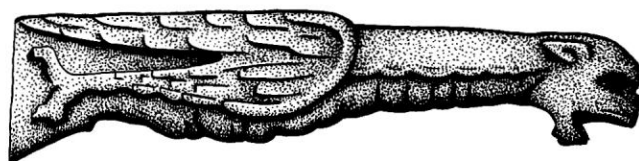
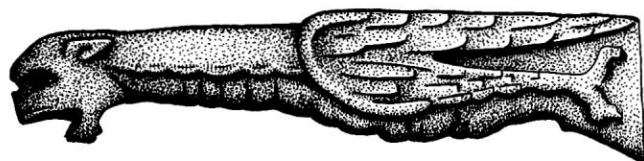
Short sword +2, *Negativity* (all spells and abilities using negative energy used by wielder have maximum possible effect); intelligent (Int 21, Wis 15, Cha 20; speech; read languages; chaotic evil; *ghoul touch* at will, *detect undead* at will, *animate dead* at lvl 20 2/day, *antilife shell* at lvl 20 1/day, *control undead* at lvl 20 1/day; ego 29); cursed (drawback: plants within six inches of wielder wither and die).

Methuen the Bald, Human/Undead Lich, 12th-level

Wizard/4th-level Loremaster: SZ M (Human); Hit Dice: 16d12; hp 100; Init: 2; AC: 17; Atk: Steelshadow +9/+4 melee (1d6+2/ 19-20 x2 crit) or touch +9/+4 melee (13 + paralysis/ x2 crit); AL CE; SV: Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +12, Special Abilities: Spells: 4-0 level, 7-1st level, 6-2nd level, 5-3rd level, 5-4th level, 5-5th level, 4-6th level, 3-7th level, 2-8th level, Secrets (weapon trick, newfound arcana), Lore, Negative Touch, Fear Aura, Paralyzing Touch, Turn Resistance +4, Damage Reduction 15/+1, Immunities (cold, electricity, polymorph, mind-affecting attacks), Phylactery (Steelshadow); Abilities: Str 10, Dex 15, Con -, Int 22, Wis 11, Cha 15; Skills and Feats: Alchemy +21, Concentration +18, Hide +14, Knowledge (arcana) +27, Knowledge (geography) +21, Knowledge (history) +21, Knowledge (the planes) +21, Listen +12, Move Silently +12, Scry +21, Search +18, Sense Motive +12, Speak Language (Aquan, Auran, Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Ignan, Orc, Sylvan, Terran, Undercommon), Spellcraft +25, Spot +12; Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item, Extend Spell, Martial Weapon Proficiency (short sword), Quicken Spell, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Skill Focus (knowledge/arcana), Spell Mastery (analyze dweomer, dispel magic, enervation, scrying, teleport, unseen servant), Still Spell.

GLIMMERWING (from pages 72-73)

Short sword +3, *Nondetection* (weapon and wielder cannot be detected by divination spells or magic items); slashing weapon; intelligent (Int 21, Wis 10, Cha 17; speech, telepathy; read magic and all languages; neutral good; wielder can *see invisible* at will, daylight 3/day, wielder has free use of Martial Weapon Proficiency (short sword), *sunbeam* at lvl 18 1/day, *fire shield* at lvl 10 2/day; find and destroy Gloomwing, damage reduction 10/+2; ego 26); cursed (intermittent functioning: only in hands of a spellcaster).



Iana Genower, Elf Outcast, 15th-level Wizard: SZ M (Elf); Hit Dice: 15d4; hp 60; Init: 9; AC: 15; Atk: Glimmerwing +11/+6 melee (1d6+4/ 17-20 x2 crit); AL CG; SV: Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +10, Special Abilities: Spells: 4-0 level, 5-1st level, 5-2nd level, 5-3rd level, 5-4th level, 4-5th level, 3-6th level, 2-7th level, 1-8th level, Elfin traits; Abilities: Str 12, Dex 20, Con 16, Int 19, Wis 13, Cha 16; Skills and Feats: Alchemy +8, Appraise +8, Concentration +11, Craft (weaponsmithing) +12, Gather Information +9, Hide +9, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (history) +8, Listen +7, Scry +12, Search +10, Speak Language (Celestial, Common, Draconic, Elven, Giant, Goblin, Gnome, Ignan, Orc, Sylvan), Spellcraft +12, Spot +7; Combat Casting, Craft Magic Arms And Armor, Dodge, Improved Critical (short sword), Improved Initiative, Maximize Spell, Mobility, Scribe Scroll, Spell Mastery (fireball, legend lore, teleport without error, tongues), Spell Penetration.

THE SWORD OF SENTAX (from pages 74-75)

Bastard sword +5, as lawful luck blade, intelligent (Int 17, Wis 24, Cha 20, speech, telepathy, *locate object* in 120 ft. radius, wielder has free use of Blind-Fight; wielder has free use of Improved Initiative; detects Sxstxax's forces at will, *globe of invulnerability*, *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, 100 ft. range, 1 minute per use, defend the servants and interests of Sentax), cursed (character must worship Sentax, item must be cleansed with holy water once per day).

OISON'S BANE (from pages 76-77)

Rapier +5, distance, flaming, spell storing, vorpal, grants access to the spell domains of good or evil (depending on the desires of the owner), law and war, intelligent (Int 20, Wis 17, Cha 20, speech, telepathy, wielder does not need to sleep, wielder does not need to breathe, *stoneskin*, *lightning bolt*, defend the servants and interests of the Sword Lord, +2 luck bonus to all saving throws, +2 deflection AC bonus, spell resistance 15).

The Sword Lord: The Sword Lord is, in fact, a pit fiend, the highest order of baatezu from the plane of Baator, who has taken a humanoid form. (He shrouds himself continually.) An invasion of this plane is underway. Oisin's Bane could be used against the great devil, though the Sword Lord does not know this. The sword is something of a "free agent," willing to work for anyone for whom it appears that help might be interesting.

Pit Fiend, Baatezu: CR16; SZ L (Outsider); Hit Dice 13d8+65; hp 123; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Speed 40 ft., fly 60ft. (average); AC 30 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +20 natural); Atk: 2 claws (+19), 2 wings (+14), bite (+14), tail slap (+14); Atk Damage: Claw (1d6+7), wing (1d4+3), bite (2d6+3 and poison plus disease), tail Slap (2d4+3);

Reach 10 ft.; Face 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Special Attacks: Spell-like abilities, fear aura, improved grab, constrict 2d4+10, summon baatezu; Special Qualities: Damage reduction 25/+2, SR 28, baatezu qualities, regeneration 5; AL LE; SV Fort +13, Ref +9, Will +13; Abilities: Str 25, Dex 13, Con 21, Int 20, Wis 20, Cha 16; Skills and Feats: Bluff +17, Climb +20, Concentration +19, disguise +17, Hide +4, Jump +19, Knowledge (arcana) +20, Listen +21, Move Silently +17, Search +21, Spellcraft +21, Spot +21; Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Power Attack.

KATANA OF THE ANCIENT EXECUTIONER

(from pages 78-79)

Longsword +4: Intelligent (Int 6, Wis 6, Cha 14; ego 9; chaotic evil); creates undead (a victim whose head is severed in a single strike from this blade rises as a zombie in 3d6 rounds if the victim's head is placed in position on its shoulders. The zombie is mindless and uncontrolled unless a control undead spell is cast on the zombie. The magic of the sword renders the spell permanent rather than expiring after a short time, but a zombie so controlled weakens and "dies" after 2d4+30 days, collapsing into a rotted corpse.

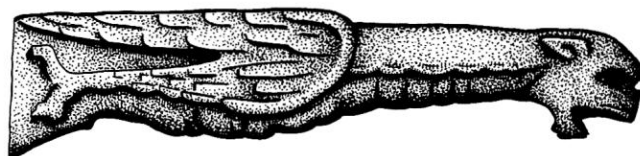
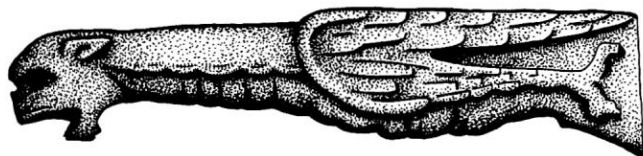
For years, the sword lay at the bottom of an impossibly steep ravine, then it was recognized by a couatl as an object of evil. The couatl has hidden the katana in a small cave near its lair.

Couatl: SZ L; Hit Dice: 9d8+18; hp 64; Init: 7; AC: 15; Atk: Bite +12 melee (1d3+6 and poison); SV: Fort +8, Ref +9, Will +10; Special Abilities: Spells: 6-0 level, 6-1st level, 6-2nd level, 6-3rd level, 4-4th level; psionics, poison, constrict, telepathy, ethereal jaunt; Abilities: Str 18, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 17, Wis 19, Cha 17; Skills: Concentration +14, Knowledge (any three) +8, Listen +16, Search +15, Sense Motive +16, Spellcraft +15, Spot +16, Tumble +15; Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Still Spell; AL LG.

BLADE OF DARK PAIN (from pages 80-81)

This weapon functions as a *longsword* +2 when wielded by a dwarf. For any nondwarf user, the sword keeps its +2 bonus but also carries a curse. In the heat of battle, all evil creatures within a 25-foot radius acquire barbarian rage directed at a nondwarf wielder of the sword for 10 rounds (DC 12).

The sword is carried by one of the orcs that escaped the bloodbath staged by two captured dwarves in an orc camp. He was last seen in the foothills of the Kohlling Mountains, but the orc is not likely to survive long while owning the sword. The sword may change hands as quickly as every few days or weeks given the nature of the curse.



Orc: SZ M; Hit Dice: 1d8; hp 8; Init: +0; Spd: 20 ft. (scale mail), base 30 ft.; AC: 10; Atk: Greataxe +3 melee (1d12+3); Face 5' x 5'; Reach 5'; SV: Fort +2, Ref +0, Will -1; Str 15, Dex 10, Con 11, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 8; Skills Listen +2, Spot +2; Feats: Alertness; AL CE.
Challenge Rating: 1/2

SWORD OF THE MAYAMORI ISLANDS (from pages 82-83)

Short sword +2 with Scabbard of Keen Edges: The user may sally upon any location on the Mayamori Islands at will for unlimited duration; the user can watch and hear any event taking place without detection from anywhere within 1,000 miles of the islands. Intelligent (Int 19, Wis 16, Cha 18; ego 14); the sword will find a way to change owners repeatedly in order to return to the islands if ever lost or stolen. The sword has limited E.S.P.—it can read the thoughts of its owner in any language but cannot communicate back to them. It also functions as a Trident of Fish Command and holds 34 charges.

The sword is kept in a magically warded vault within the sultan's palace on the Mayamouri Islands. Only the sultan, his wife, and two trusted aides know the secret of opening the vault.

WIZARD'S SALVATION (from pages 84-85)

These weapons typically function as normal daggers, except that individual wounds heal in a number of rounds equal to their damage (i.e., a 2-hp wound heals in 2 rounds). Because they are used for practice by wizards, a wizard who is injured normally ceases combat until a wound is healed before proceeding further, depending on her level and total number of hit points.

The dagger corrupted by Lymmis functions in this manner as well, except that the dagger is intelligent (Int 7, Wis 6, Cha 4; ego 9) enough to sense when the user is attempting a mortal wound (such as a throat slash to a tied or held victim). Then the victim's healing is postponed until the instant of death, and the wound closes completely without a trace. Lost blood is not restored, however, and the victim dies, leaving his death something of a mystery.

ZOMBIE BLADE (from pages 86-87)

Longsword +4; increases zombie's ability stats by 1 point every three days (see stats below); animate dead 20x/day; control undead—all zombies in a 1-mile radius; imposes -5 penalty to all turning rolls; undead regeneration.

Zombie Warrior: SZ: Medium-Size Undead (Evil, Chaotic); Hit Dice: 10d12+10 (77 hp); Initiative: +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Speed: 30 ft; AC: 20 (+3 Dex, +7 natural); Attacks: by Zombie Blade +10/+5 melee; Damage: 1d8+10 by Zombie Blade; Slam 1d6+5;

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; Special Qualities: Immune to turning; powers imbued by Zombie blade (see below); Saves: Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +0; Abilities*: Str 20, Dex 20, Con 20, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 1; Skills and Feats: Intimidate +5, Jump +4, Listen +4, Move Silently +3, Search +3; Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (Zombie Blade), Toughness, Combat Reflexes; CR:8; Imbued Powers (from sword): Regeneration 3, Undead; Animate Dead (per spell), Control Zombies (1-mile radius), Penalty to Turning (-5 to turning attempts)

*Reflexes stats after maximum magical advancement by the Zombie Blade

ELF TONGUE (from pages 88-89)

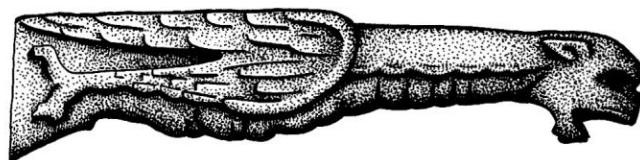
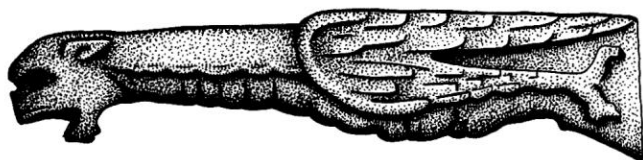
Longsword +3 (60%); short sword +3 (30%); broadsword +3 (10%); all blades are considered masterwork items; if used against an elf in combat, the blades are +5, and have a critical range of 16-20 with a x4 multiplier.

Any non-elf carrying an elf-tongue must make a Will save for every encounter with an elf (or half-elf) against a DC of 14, or begin to feel intense loathing and hatred towards that individual. If the save is failed, they instantly attack all elves in sight. If the sword should fall into the hands of someone with elven blood in their veins, a save against the same DC is required each day or the possessor attempts some form of suicide. This death may take the form of entering combat against overwhelming odds, or something as simple as driving the sword through their own chest.

GRIMM'S REAVER (from pages 90-91)

This longsword needs to constantly take a life. In combat, every human or humanoid slain by the weapon (monsters do not count) give it a +1 bonus to either damage, to hit, or armor class value—beginning with +0/+0/+0. Where the bonuses are used is up to the wielder, or can be determined randomly by the DM. There is no limit to the bonuses, as long as there are opponent to feed the sword. Once combat is over, and there are no more enemies to fight, all bonuses are lost. Those friendly to the possessor are not considered to be enemies.

For each day the sword does not take a life, the possessor must make a Will save with a DC roll versus the number of days he has not killed someone in battle. Once the save is failed, the wielder is possessed by the weapon and must take a life. This includes friend or foe, to a maximum of one life for every day the wielder had not previously killed someone. If the save is failed and there is no one to kill, the sword compels the wielder to take their own life by falling on the blade.



BLACKHEART (from pages 92-93)

Shord sword +5; similar to a holy avenger, though with an evil twist; creates a spell resistance of 15 in a 5-foot radius, and casts dispel magic in a 5-foot radius at the class level of the wielder.

Any humanoid grasping the blade is automatically possessed by the spirit of a 10th-level blackguard, unless they have a Wisdom ability score of 17 or higher. If this is the case, the wielder is allowed a Will saving throw versus a DC of 15 every 24 hours. If the possessor should fall asleep or otherwise be rendered unconscious, the sword takes control for one day. After that it is a battle for control of the wielder's body between the sword and the host.

The curse of the blade is that the wielder cannot tell anyone of the sword's powers, or that they may be possessed. Should the host gain the upper hand against the sword, the curse does not prevent the wielder from taking his own life. Only the death of the host can separate the innocent from the soul of the blackguard.

SCIMITAR OF THE ANCESTORS (from pages 94-95)

Keen defender scimitar +4; intelligent (Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 4; speech; lawful good; *detect magic* at will, wielder can *see invisible* at will; defend the Renaven family and its members, +2 luck bonus to all saves, +2 deflection bonus, spell resistance 15; Ego 19); cursed (requirement: character must swear fealty to the Renaven family).

WIZARD'S FRIEND (from pages 96-97)

Dagger +3; intelligent (Int 17, Wis 14, Cha 17; speech; neutral good; *detect magic* at will, *cure light wounds* [1d8+5] on wielder 1/day; *charm person* [DC 11] on contact 3/day, *globe of invulnerability* 1/day; Ego 14); cursed (requirement: character must change his class to wizard if not of that class already).

DAGGER OF DEFENSE (from pages 98-99)

Keen dagger of ghost touch +1; +2 to attempts to disarm an opponent or strike at an opponent's weapon; intelligence (Int 15, Wis 17, Cha 17; speech; neutral; wielder has free use of Sunder, wielder has free use of Improved Disarm, *shield* on wielder 3/day [15 min. duration]; Ego 16)

SOULSONG (from pages 100-101)

Longsword +4; intelligent (Int 19, Cha 11, Wis 21; lawful good; *cure light wounds*, *haste* and *tongues* at will; *speech* and *telepathy*; ego 13); weapon deals 2d4 additional fire damage with each successful hit; weapon has a 70% chance of shattering any blade it comes into contact with (GM should roll for each turn that the character wielding

this sword is in combat with another creature with a blade); imparts a +10 bonus to the owner's Armor Class; cursed (the blade will sing at random times except during combat; all who hear it sing must make a Willpower check (DC 25) or be enthralled for 1d6 hours).

Presstin Palace Guard, 8th-Level Fighter: SZ M (human or half-elf); Hit Dice: 8d10+16; hp 56; Init: +3 (Dex); Speed: 30; AC: 17 (+3 Dex, +6 chainmail +1); Atk: longsword +1, +12 melee (1d8+3); Reach: 5 x 5; Face: 5; SV: Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +5; Abilities: Str 15, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 14; Skills: Listen +10, Move Silently +9, Search +7, Sense Motive +7, Spot +13; Feats: any (7 total); AL LN.

Challenge rating: 8

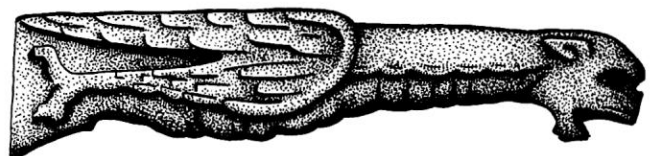
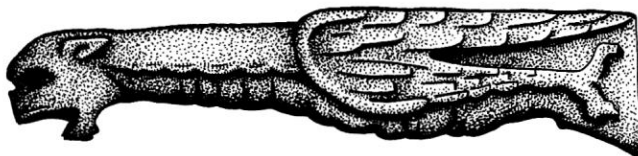
SWORD OF DARKNESS (from pages 102-103)

Longsword (katana) +4; intelligent (Int 21, Cha 19, Wis 13; ego 23; chaotic evil; *bestow curse*, *confusion*, *darkness*, *fear*, *suggestion* and *tongues* at will; *dominate person* and *passwall* 3/day; *soul bind* 1/day; *speech* and *telepathy*; ego 27); weapon deals 2d6 lightning damage and 1 negative level on each successful hit; sword grants the owner +8 levels on all Dex-based skill checks; owner has the ability to instantly find any creature wearing the mark of Kressl within a 50-mile radius; when Lolth communicates through the sword, the owner must make a Willpower check (DC 35) or else immediately carry out those orders; cursed (character must make a Willpower check (DC 20) once per day or kill the nearest creature).

Xent'cal, 14th-Level Fighter/8th-Level Sorcerer: SZ M (drow); Hit Dice: 14d10 + 8d4 +44; hp 130; Init: +4 (Dex); Speed: 30; AC: 23 (+4 Dex, +9 chainmail +4); Atk: rapier +4, +21 melee (1d6+7); Reach: 5 x 5; Face: 5; SV: Fort +11, Ref +8, Will +6; Abilities: Str 16, Dex 19, Con 15, Int 18, Wis 11, Cha 11; Special Abilities: spells as 8th-level sorcerer; Skills: Appraise +14, Balance +17, Climb +21, Concentration +14, Escape Artist +19, Hide +24, Intimidate +15, Listen +12, Move Silently +24, Sense Motive +15, Spot +15; Feats: any (14 total); AL CE. Challenge rating: 16

NIGHT TERROR (from pages 104-105)

Rapier +4; intelligent (Int 15, Cha 10, Wis 21; lawful good; *improved invisibility* and *tongues* at will; *minor globe of invulnerability* 1/day; *speech* and *telepathy*; ego 12); the sword grants the owner the abilities of *true sight* (as the spell, may be activated or deactivated at any time) and *telepathy* (the owner can read the surface thoughts of any creature within a line of sight and can instantly tell if that person is telling the truth or not); cursed (the owner may not willingly give up the weapon and is compelled to



hunt the worst and most evil creatures that he or she detects with the weapon's powers).

Kieren Nuchtel, 17th-Level Fighter: SZ M (human); Hit Dice: 17d10+51; hp 136; Init: +2 (Dex); Speed: 30; AC: 22 (+2 Dex, +10 full plate +2); Atk: long sword +4, +24 melee (1d8+7); Reach: 5 x 5; Face: 5; SV: Fort +13, Ref +7, Will +8; Abilities: Str 16, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 17, Cha 13; Skills: Animal Empathy +5, Climb +9, Diplomacy +6, Disguise +4, Handle Animal +8, Intimidate +11, Intuit Direction +9, Listen +13, Move Silently +14, Ride +8, Search +12, Spot +13, Swim +9, Wilderness Lore +8; Feats: any (15 total); AL LG. Challenge rating: 18

SKYFIRE (from pages 106-107)

Longsword +3; intelligent (Int 12, Cha 21, Wis 14; lawful evil; *bless* and *cure light wounds* 5/day; *cure serious wounds*, *defile*, *finger of death* and *stoneskin* (bearer only) 1/day; *speech* and *telepathy*; ego 26); the sword was crafted especially to fight the followers of Cyrenx and deals an additional 2d6 poison damage to any lawful good creatures (Fortitude save DC 20 or sustain an additional 1d6 points of temporary Constitution loss); sword grants a +5 bonus to the wielder's Charisma and Armor Class.

Nostarr the Brave, 15th-Level Fighter: SZ M (elf); Hit Dice: 13d10+26; hp 91; Init: +4 (Dex); Speed: 30; AC: 27 (+4 Dex, +8 full plate, +5 Skyfire); Atk: Greatsword +3, +20 melee (2d6+5); Reach: 5 x 5; Face: 5; SV: Fort +11, Ref +10, Will +5; Abilities: Str 15, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 14; Skills: Escape Artist +9, Gather Information +9, Intuit Direction +5, Listen +6, Move Silently +14, Spot +7; Feats: any (13 total); AL LE. Challenge rating: 18

ADVIS (from pages 108-109)

Flaming burst dagger +3; intelligent (Int 18, Wis 14, Cha 12; speech, neutral; wielder has free use of *Sunder*, *cure light wounds* on wielder 1/day, +4 enhancement bonus to wielder's Strength; Ego 16); cursed (drawback: temperature around item is 10° warmer than normal).

TERRAN BLADE (from pages 110-111)

Short sword +2, trembling earth (by using a standard action to stab the short sword's blade into the ground, floor, or similar surface the wielder may cause a shock-wave once per day. The effect is similar to an *earthquake* along a 10 ft. wide path extending up to 120 ft.); intelligent (Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 19; speech, read known languages; chaotic neutral; Terran Blade can Intuit Direction [10 ranks], *detect magic* at will, *detect secret doors* at will, *stoneskin* [wielder only, 10 minutes per use] 2/day, *pass-*

wall at will; *defeat/slay all*, *flesh to stone* [DC 16]; Ego 23); cursed (drawback: the wielder suffers a -2 penalty to all saves vs. air- or electricity-based effects; plague: the wielder becomes a carrier of the disease lung fever. Anyone within 5 ft. of the wielder or anyone stricken by lung fever may contract the disease. Victims killed with the Terran Blade also carry this disease and anyone passing within 5 ft. of the corpse for 2d4 days after death may also become ill. The wielder of the terran blade is immune to lung fever).

Lung Fever: The victims of lung fever suffer fever, chills, and shortness of breath. At the latest stages of the disease, victims develop a hacking cough. Infection: inhaled, DC 13, incubation: 1d4 days, damage: 1d4 Con.

FORTIS (from pages 112-113)

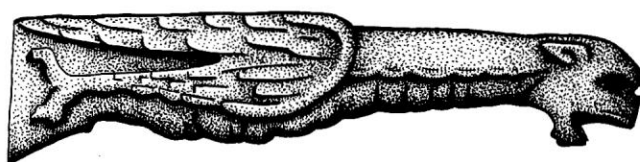
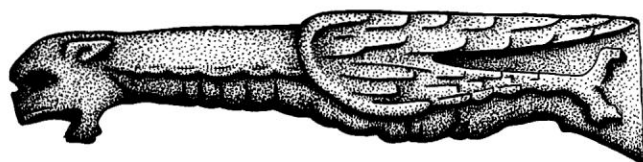
Icy burst dagger +3; intelligent (Int 17, Wis 13, Cha 12; speech, neutral, wielder has free use of Expertise, wielder has free use of evasion, *stoneskin* on wielder 2/day, +4 enhancement bonus to wielder's Constitution; Ego 16); cursed (drawback: character must make a Will save at DC 15 each day or take 1 point of temporary Charisma damage).

SERPENT FANG (from pages 114-115)

Dagger of venom +3; intelligent (Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 15; empathy; neutral evil; *detect magic* at will, *feeblemind* by touch 2/day; *defeat/slay* arcane spellcasters, *fear* [DC 14] for 1d4 rounds; Ego 13); cursed (intermittent functioning: out of direct sunlight; requirement: dagger acts as a standard *dagger of venom* until used to kill someone for no reason other than to activate its powers).

Paloight: Male 3rd-level Rogue/4th-level

Necromancer/2nd-level Assassin: CR 9; SZ: Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 3d6+6 plus 4d4+8 plus 2d6+4; hp 48; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 19 (touch 14, flat-footed 15); Atk +13 melee (1d4+4 plus poison/19-20, Serpent Fang), +10 ranged (1d8/19-20, masterwork light crossbow); SA death attack (DC 15), sneak attack +3d6, poison use; SQ evasion, +1 save vs. poison, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked); AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +11, Will +6; Str 13, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 8, Cha 9. Height 5 ft 9 in., weight 165 lbs.; Skills and Feats: Alchemy +10, Climb +7, Concentration +9, Craft (trap-making) +12, Disable Device +9, Disguise +5, Hide +14, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (history) +10, Listen +5, Move Silently +23, Search +9, Spellcraft +10; Dodge, Iron Will, Scribe Scroll, Still Spell, Weapon Finesse (dagger), Weapon Focus (dagger); Possessions: *Serpent Fang*, +2 *silent studded leather*, *scroll of see invisibility*, *sleep*, and *shield*, *potion of blur*, masterwork light crossbow; Spells (5/5/4, 4th-level caster, base DC 13+spell level, arcane



spell failure 15%): 0—*daze, detect magic, ghost sound, light, mage hand*; 1st—*cause fear, charm person, chill touch, expeditious retreat, ray of enfeeblement*; 2nd—*ghoul touch, invisibility, scare, true strike (still spell)*. (2, 2nd-level caster, base DC 13+spell level, arcane spell failure 15%): 1st—*change self* (2).

CAISLEAN (from pages 116-117)

Longsword +2; greatsword, vorpal, wounding, intelligent (Int 21, Wis 20, Cha 17, chaotic neutral, speech, telepathy, wielder has use of expertise, item can intuit direction, detect magic at will, shield on wielder, charm person on contact, true seeing); cursed (once every six months, owner must make a Will save or permanently transfer one point of Int, Wis or Cha [game master's choice] to Caislean; this is not alterable except by a wish spell.).

Agrik of Makkarak, 5th-Level Barbarian (Owner 79): SZ M (half-orc); Hit Dice 5d12; hp 50; Init 6; AC 12; Atk: Greatsword +9 (2d6+6/19-20x2 crit); AL CN; SV: Fort +8; Ref +3; Will +2; Special Abilities: Barbarian abilities; half-orc traits; Str 19, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 11, Wis 15, Cha 17; Skills and Feats: Intimidate +7, Intuit Direction +6, Listen +4, Ride +4, Wilderness Lore +7; Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative.

Copper Dragon Daranda, Adult: CR 13; SZ L; Hit Dice: 20d12+80; hp 210; Init: 0; Speed: 40, fly 150 (clumsy); AC: 28 (-1 size, +19 natural); Atk Bonus: +25; Atk: 1 Bite (2d6); 2 claws (1d8); 2 wings (1d6); 1 tail slap (1d8); Reach: 10 ft. Face: 5 ft. by 10 ft.; Special Attacks: Breath weapon (12d4 DC24), Frightful Presence DC 23; Special Qualities: acid immunity, damage reduction 5/+1, jump +20, spell-like abilities (2/day stone shape, 1/day transmute rock to mud, wall of stone, move earth), spider climb; AL CG; SV: Fort +16, Ref +12, Will +15; Abilities: Str 23, Dex 10, Con 19, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 16; Skills and Feats: Spellcraft +26; Listen +40, Spot +40, Search +40, Bluff +30, Concentration +21; Escape Artist +26; Knowledge (human lore) +39; Cleave (tail slap), Weapon Focus (bite), Flyby Attack, Power Attack, Alertness, Snatch, Wingover.

RAYNA'S HEART (from pages 118-119)

Longsword +3 against any woman, +5 vorpal against any man, defending, keen, neutrally aligned, holy, intelligent (Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 8, speech, wielder has free use of *evanescence*, cure light wounds on wielder 1/day, cat's grace, defend women of any race).

The Clanlands being similar to the American great plains (and the Dulama similar in culture to the Native Americans of the Plains), there are lots of places where a weapon might be lost, but any metal would be greatly

prized.

LEAR, THE SERPENT OF CALEDONIA (from pages 120-121)

Bastard sword +5, defending, holy, keen, speed; neutral evil blade, intelligent (Int 17, Wis 18, Cha 13, Ego 14, speech, wielder has free use of mobility, wielder can see invisible at will, teleport, 600 lb. maximum, defend the servants and interests of Lear, *slay living* in pursuit of those interests).

Queen Nananda VII of Caledonia, 13th-Level Ranger:

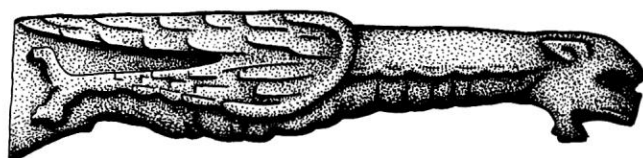
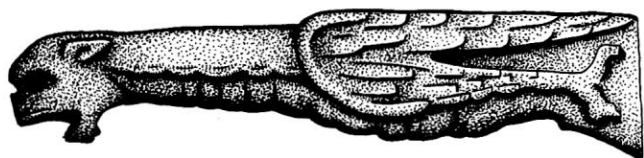
SZ M (Human); Hit Dice 13d10; hp 121; Init 3; AC 13l Atk: Greatsword: +16/+11/+6 (2d6+4/19-20x2 crit); AL NG; SV Fort +11; Ref +7; Will +7; Str 16, Dex 17, Con 18; Int 14, Wis 19, Cha 17; Special Abilities: Ranger Abilities, Spells: 2—1st level, 2—2nd level, 2—3rd level; Skills and Feats: Animal Empathy +15, Concentration +11, Diplomacy +7, Gather Information +5, Handle Animal +11, Heal +11, Intuit Direction +10, Knowledge: Religion +5, Knowledge: Nature +7, Listen +10, Ride +9, Search +5; Alertness, Craft Wondrous Item, Empower Spell, Exotic Weapon Master: Two-Bladed Sword, Power Attack, Quicken Spell, Track.

NATHLAQUA, THE SERPENT OF THE UNDERLANDS (from pages 122-123)

Bastard sword +3; dancing (20 rounds limit rather than 4); frost; shock; bane: elementals; bane: outsiders, good; as *sword of life stealing*; grants access to the magic domains of Earth, Evil, and Plant to wielder's level; intelligent (Int 14, Wis 11, Cha 16, empathy, wielder does not need to sleep, detect thoughts, special purpose: defeat/slay nagas and driders [this special purpose will trigger only when the sword is in the possession of a non-naga/non-drider]).

The Underworld Kingdom of the Naga can be accessed from a number of locations aboveground. A topsider looking to get into the kingdom would look in four places primarily: caves with deep running rivers, underground dungeon complexes, tidal basins with caves, and the interior of volcanoes. The most likely encounter is either 1d4 driders or 1d6 Fist nagas. At the height of the naga, hierarchy one might find 1d2 dark or guardian nagas.

Fist Naga: SZ L (Aberration); Hit Dice 7d8+28; hp 59; Init: +1; Speed 30 ft.; AC 15 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +5 natural); Atk Bonus: +7; Atk: Bite (2d6+4 and poison); Reach: 10 ft.; Face: 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Special Attacks: Poison, spells (as 7th-level spellcaster); SV; AL N, CN, or CE: Fort +6; Ref +5; Will +8; Abilities: Str 16, Dex 13, Con 18, Int 10, Wis 17, Cha 15; Skills and Feats: Concentration +12; Listen +10; Spellcraft +8; spot +10; Lightning Reflexes.



SWORD OF TAKAL (from pages 124-125)

Longsword +3, +5 vs. *outsiders*; intelligent (Int 16, Cha 8, Wis 12; lawful good; *dismissal*, *tongues*, *true seeing*, *wall of fire* and *wall of ice* at will; *globe of invulnerability* 1/day; *gate*, *protection from spells* and *soul bind* 1/day; *telepathy*; ego 21); bestows 1d6 negative levels on the target each time it deals damage; adds +6 to the AC of the creature wielding it; deals 2d6 damage and 1d4 negative levels to any non-lawful good creature that tries to use it; it may not be removed from the obelisk except by a lawful good individual on a quest to destroy a powerful outsider.

BLACK SOUL'S REVENGE (from page 126-127)

Rapier +3; intelligent (Int 9, Cha 17, Wis 13; *charm person*, *dream*, *emotion*, *fear* and *mage armor* at will, *protection from spells* and *spell turning* 1/day; *empathy*; ego 23); any creature that comes into possession of the weapon must make a Willpower save once per day (DC 30) or else change to a random alignment; once the alignment change has been made, do not make the check again; cursed (character will not willingly give the weapon up).

Ragahar, 13th-Level Fighter: SZ M (dwarf); Hit Dice: 12d10+60; hp 120; Init: +1 (Dex); Speed: 20; AC: 18 (+1 Dex, +7 banded mail +3); Atk: scimitar +3, +19 melee (1d6+6); Reach: 5 x 5; Face: 5; SV: Fort +13, Ref +5, Will +5; Abilities: Str 17, Dex 12, Con 20, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 8; Skills: Craft (swordsmith) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +5, Spot +8; Feats: any (11 total); AL NE. Challenge rating: 12

SWORD OF THE ELF LORD (from pages 128-129)

Bastard sword +3; Intelligent weapon able to speak with wielder, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 16, ego 19. A chaotic good aligned weapon granting the wielder *feather fall* once a day and *spider climb* once a day. The wielder can *teleport* once a day and the blades purpose is to defeat/slay all enemies of the elves.

Tragian Elf Lord, 12th level Sorcerer: SZ M (Elf); Hit Dice: 12d4; hp 68; Init: +4 (Dex); Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 22 (+4 Dex, +8 Elf Chainmail +3); Atk: Longsword +6/1 melee; Longbow +10/5 melee; Dmg: Enchanted Longsword 1d8 +3 x3 crit, Enchanted Longbow +3 1d8 x3 crit; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.; Special Attacks: Spells 6 -0 level, 7 -1st, 7 -2nd, 6 -3rd, 6 -4th, 5 -5th; Special Qualities: Elf Traits; SV: Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +8; Abilities: Str 10, Dex 19, Con 17, Int 19, Wis 10, Cha 15; Skills: Concentration +18, Knowledge (arcane) +19, Spellcraft +19, Craft (Armorsmithing) +19, Craft (Blacksmithing) +19, Craft (Weaponsmithing) +19; Feats: Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved unarmed Strike, Spell Penetration, Two-Weapon Fighting; AL CG.

Mountainsplitter Dwarf Prince, 11th level Fighter: SZ M (Dwarf); Hit Dice: 11d10; hp 112; Init: +4 (Dex, Improved Initiative); Speed: 20 ft.; AC: 22 (+2 Dex, +10 Dwarf Halfplate Armor +3); Atk: Dwarf Warhammer +14/9/4 melee; Dmg: Dwarf Warhammer 1d8 +3 x3 crit, Enchanted Longbow +3 1d8 x3 crit; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.; Special Qualities: Dwarf Traits; SV: Fort +13, Ref +5, Will +6; Abilities: Str 17, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 10; Skills: Craft (Blacksmithing) +15, Craft (Gemcutting) +15, Hide +15; Feats: Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (Warhammer), Improved Initiative, Iron Will; AL CG.

Selsensa Gnome 9th level Wizard: SZ S (Humanoid Gnome); Hit Dice: 9d4; hp 22; Init: +1 (Dex); Speed: 20 ft.; AC: 16 (+1 Dex, +4 bracers); Atk: Dagger +4 melee, Dart +6 ranged; Dmg: Dagger 1d4 19-20/ x2 crit, Dart 1d4 x2 crit; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.; Special Attacks: Gnome Traits, Spells 5 -0 level, 6 -1st, 6 -2nd, 5 -3rd, 4 -4th, 2 -5th; Special Qualities: Gnome Traits, speak with animals; SV: Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +5; Abilities: Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 9, Cha 6; Skills: Concentration +12, Craft (Bookbinding) +16, Knowledge (Arcana) +16, Knowledge (Nature) +16, Scry +16, Spellcraft +16; Feats: Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Improved Unarmed Strike, Lightning Reflexes, Scribe Scroll; AL NG.

HUMAN ENDER (from pages 130-131)

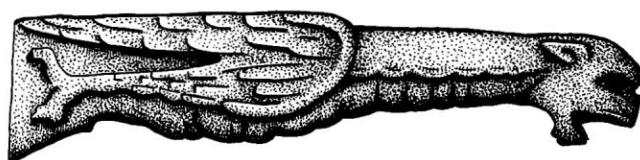
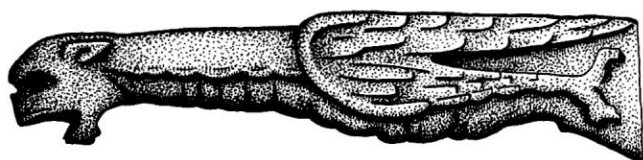
Bastard sword +1; The sword does an additional 1d6 versus humans. The sword glows bright green when within 30 yards of humans. The weapon has a penalty of -6 to strike dwarves.

Troglodyte Chieftain, 7th level Cleric: SZ: M (Humanoid Reptilian); Hit Dice: 7d8 +7; hp 43; Init: +0; Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 21 (+5 Breastplate, +6 natural); Atk: Longspear +7 melee (or 2 claws +7 melee), bite 7 melee; or javelin 5 ranged; Dmg: Longspear 1d8, bite 1d4, claw 1d4, or javelin 1d6; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft. (10 ft. with longspear); Special Attacks: Spells 7 -0 level, 6 -1st, 5 -2nd, 4 -3rd, 2 -4th; Stench; Special Qualities: Darkvision 90 ft., Turn or Rebuke Undead, Spontaneous Casting; SV: Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +2; Skills: Spellcraft +9; Feats: Leadership, Multiattack, Weapon Focus (javelin); AL CE.

ROGUE'S DAGGER

Dagger +3; grants +4 to the wielder in the following skills: Move Silently, Open Lock, Use Magic Device, Pick Pocket, Bluff. Grants the wielder Spider Climb as the spell three times a day. The weapon does an additional 2d6 damage on any successful strike versus fighters.

Moon Silver Elf Bow +2: During the light of the moon the



bow grants the wielder a bonus +4 to hit. The range of this bow is double that of a normal longbow. Strings on this bow will never get wet and the bow will never break through normal use.

Endrin 'o the Bow, 10th level Ranger: SZ M (Human); Hit Dice: 10d6 +30; hp 73; Init: 4; Speed: 30; AC 17 (+4 Dex, +3 Studded Leather); Atk: Enchanted Dagger 13/8 melee, Longbow 11/6 ranged; Dmg: Enchanted Dagger 1d4 19-20/x2 crit (additional 2d6 versus fighter types), longbow 1d8 x3crit; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.; Special Abilities: Uncanny Dodge, Can't be Flanked, Rogue Weapon Proficiencies, Traps, Improved Evasion; Special Attacks: Sneak Attack +5d6; SV: Fort +6, Ref +13, Will +2; Abilities: Str 16, Dex 18, Con 17, Int 18, Wis 9, Cha 14; Skills: Diplomacy +15, Disguise +15, Escape Artist +17; Hide +17; Open Lock +17; Pick Pocket +17; Search +17; Profession (Fletcher) +12; Feats: Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Lightning Reflexes, Simple Weapon Proficiency, AL NG.

REN'S DAGGER OF FLYING (from pages 134-135)

Dagger +3; The weapon can be thrown accurately twice as far as normal daggers. The weapon slays gargoyles with a successful strike. When thrown and after any type of strike, the weapon flies back to the hand of the thrower.

Gargoyle: SZ M (Magical Beast Earth); Hit Dice: 4d10 +16; hp 38; Init: +2; Speed: 45 ft., fly 75 ft. (average); AC: 16 (+2 Dex, +4 natural); Atk: 2 claws +6 melee, bite +4 melee, gore +4 melee; Dmg: Claw 1d4, bite 1d6, gore 1d6; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.; Special Qualities: Damage reduction 15/+1, freeze; SV: Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +1; Abilities: Str 11, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 6, Wis 11, Cha 7; Skills: Hide +9, Listen +4, Spot +4; Feats: Multiattack, Weapon Finesse (claw, bite, gore); AL CE; CR 4.

STANARDBEARER (from pages 136-137)

Dagger +3, *human leadership* (a human wielder can raise and lead armies of humans, regardless of differences in culture, class, language, or alignment. The knife grants the wielder: +6 enhancement bonus to Charisma; +10 enhancement bonus to Animal Empathy, Diplomacy, Gather Information, Knowledge (history), Ride, and Sense Motive skill checks; Leadership feat; *tongues* spell-like ability at will; intelligent (Int 18, Wis 20, Cha 16; speech; neutral; *telepathy* 100-ft. range; all Knowledge skills at 15 ranks; ego 26).

HOBGOBLIN SOLDIER'S KNIFE (from pages 138-139)

Lieutenant's Knife: *Dagger* +1

Captain's Knife: *Dagger* +1, and a +1 enhancement of

DM's choice

Major's Knife: *Dagger* +2 and a +1 enhancement of DM's choice

General's Knife: *Dagger* +3 and a +2 enhancement of DM's choice. This dagger also endows the wearer with a continual nondetection spell as if cast by a 16th-level spellcaster. Hezburit's scry forge is the single exception to the nondetection ability. He may scry through a knife with no penalty. Further, this knife grants the bearer a commune spell once per week. The questions are asked of Hezburit himself.

All knives can be the object of a scry spell attempt by the gelugon, Hezburit. Hezburit has a magical forge fire that he uses to scry into the knives.

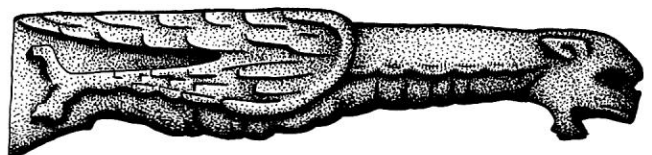
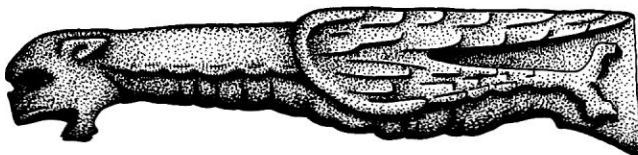
Hezburit/Gelugon (Baatezu): SZ L (Outsider); Hit Dice: 16d8+80; hp 167; Init: +1 (Dex); Speed: 40; AC: 28 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +18 natural); Atk: 2 claws +19 melee (1d8+6), bite +16 melee (2d4+3), tail +16 melee (3d4+3) and cold; Reach: 10 x 10; Face: 15; Special attacks: Spell-like abilities, fear aura, cold, summon baatezu; Special Qualities: Damage reduction 20/+2, SR 25, baatezu qualities, regeneration 5; SV: Fort +15, Ref +11, Will +16; Abilities: Str 23, Dex 13, Con 21, Int 22, Wis 22, Cha 16; Skills: Bluff +22, Climb +22, Concentration +22, Disguise +22, Jump +22, Knowledge (Arcana) +22, Listen +26, Move Silently +22, Scry +22, Search +22, Sense Motive +22, Spellcraft +25, Spot +26; Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Power Attack; AL LE. Challenge rating: 19

THE SWORD OF WORLDS (from pages 140-141)

Longsword +3, *bane* (tanar'ri), *gate* (the wielder can open a gate for planar travel as per the spell of the same name. It cannot be used to call an extraplanar creature. To open the gate, the sword must be used to deliver the killing blow to a sentient creature immediately prior to opening the gate, the victim's life force powering the magic.)

Rynn Khor, The Dark Wanderer, 8th-Level Rogue, 2nd-Level Sorcerer: Sz M (Half Elf):

Hit dice 8d6+2d4; hp 50; Init +3 AC: 15; Atk: Short sword +12/+7 (1d6+5/19-20/x2) or short bow +10/+5 (1d6/x3); AL NE; SV: Fort +3, Ref +9, Will +5; Special abilities: Spells: 6—0 Level, 5—1 level; Half-elf traits, Rogue abilities, Sorcerer abilities; Abilities: Str 14, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 16; Skills and Feats: Appraise +9, Balance +11, Climb +9, Disable Device +8, Disguise +5, Escape Artist +7, Gather information +11, Hide +8, Jump +7, Listen +10, Move Silently +15, Open Locks +15, Pick Pocket +10, Scry +5, Search +8, Spellcraft +5, Use Magic Device +8; Ambidexterity, Dodge, Power Attack, Spell Focus:



Illusion; Familiar: Mischka (Cat).

MASTER COLNAR'S DUELING SWORD

(from pages 142-143)

Longsword +2, defending, keen, intelligent (Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 11; speech; neutral; combat reflexes; expertise; Wielder gains spell resistance 22; Ego 11), cursed (wielder cannot cast any spells)

Roland Born, wielder of Master Colnar's Sword, 6th-Level Expert/2nd-Level Warrior: SZ M (Human), Hit Dice 6d6+2d8, hp 50; Init +0; AC 14; Atk: Longsword +10 (1d8+4); AL N; SV: Fort +10, Ref +2, Wil +7; Special Abilities: Human traits; Abilities: Str 15, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 12, Skills: Appraise +7, Craft +10, Gather Information +6, Handle Animal +4, Knowledge (weapons) +6, Listen +7, Profession +8, Sense Motive +5, Spot +9; Great Fortitude.

WARSWORD OF DARAK (from pages 144-145)

Longsword +3, Command (the wielder gains a +2 bonus to all social checks and can be heard by clearly by anyone within 500 feet), wounding; intelligent (Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 13; speech; lawful neutral; combat reflexes; jump; leadership; sunder; expertise; disintegrate; Ego 22); cursed (berserk fury – at the start of every round of combat the wielder must make a WIL save [DC 15] or else attack the nearest individual, be it friend or foe)

Grushak, Chief of the Nagraz Tribe and "Emperor" of the Orcs, 6th-Level Barbarian: SZ M (Orc); Hit Dice 6d12; hp 51; Init +2; AC 15; Atk: Longsword +13/+8 (1d8+7); AL: NE; SV: Fort +7, Ref +2, Wil +1; Special Abilities: Orc traits, Barbarian abilities; Abilities: Str 18, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 5; Skills and Feats: Climb +9, Craft +5, Intuit Direction +2, Jump +7, Listen +4, Ride +5, Spot +5, Wilderness Lore +5; Cleave, Power Attack, Whirlwind Attack.

KISS OF THE KARSHA (from page 146)

To use a Kiss of Karsha as anything other than an overly flexible dagger, the possessor must devote a skill slot to this weapon specifically. Whenever such a skilled user makes an attack the blade, roll 1d10 and add the result to the attack total. (In other words, this 1d10 roll acts as a random bonus to the attack.)

Armor-Piercing Strike: On a result of 1 on this 1d10 bonus roll, ignore any armor bonus of the target, and apply the following special rules. If the attack is successful, a vital organ has been pierced in a killing blow. (The target dies, regardless of remaining hit points.) Roll 1d4 for the number of rounds that the blade remains stuck within the victim during its death throes. If the attack

misses, the blade breaks off in the victim's armor or skeleton and the weapon is rendered useless.

SWORD OF THE FLIES (from page 147)

Longsword -1, cursed, fly swarms. This weapon is chaotic evil but causes no damage to characters of different alignment who touch it. The sword attracts swarms of flies, 1-3 swarms per hour starting the third hour after the weapon changes owners.

Goblins: SZ S (Goblinoid); Hit Dice: 1d8; hp 4; Init: +1; Spd: 30; AC 15 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +3 studded leather); Atk: Morningstar +1 (1d8 -1); or javelin +3 (1d6 -1) ranged; Face 5' x 5'; Reach 5'; Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 8, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 8; Skills: Hide +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +3; Feats: Alertness; AL NE. Challenge Rating: 6

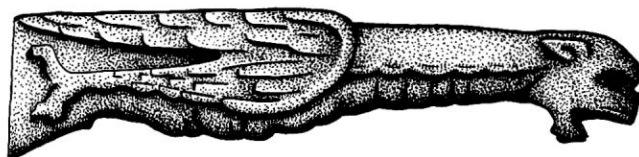
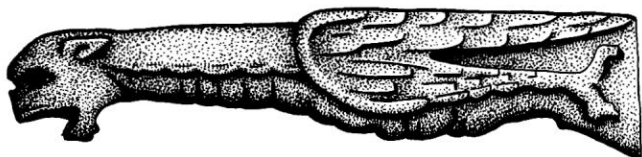
Fly Swarm: SZ M; Hit Dice: 1d8-1; hp 3; Init: +1; Spd: Fly 45; AC 22 (+1 Dex, +11 natural); Atk: Bites +1 melee (1d8 -1); Face 5' x 5'; Reach 5'; Special Qualities: immune to normal weapons; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -4; Str -, Dex 13, Con -, Int 1, Wis 1, Cha -; Skills: none; Feats: none; AL N. Challenge Rating: 3

WHISTLER (from page 148)

Short sword +3, Songmaster (wielder is immune to sonic attacks or effects); intelligent (Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 9; empathy; chaotic good; shatter at will, sculpt sound 3/day, fear 1/day; Ego 11).

Aidan Hosler, Human/Undead Ghost, 14th-level Ranger: SZ M (Human); Hit Dice: 14d12; hp 91; Init: 8; AC: 16 {14}; Atk: {Whistler +21/+16/+11 melee (1d6+3/ 19-20 x2 crit)} or {touch +18/+13/+8 melee (1d4/ x2 crit)}; SV: Fort +9, Ref +8, Will +7, Special Abilities: Spells: 3-1st level, 2-2nd level, 2-3rd level, Favored Enemies (goblinoids +3, vermin +2, beasts +1), Incorporeal, Manifestation, Corrupting Touch, Telekinesis, Rejuvenation (unless Hawkeye is returned to grave), Turn Resistance +4; Abilities: Str -, Dex 18, Con -, Int 12, Wis 17, Cha 19; Skills and Feats: Animal Empathy +16, Climb +7, Handle Animal +13, Hide +16, Intuit Direction +12, Jump +7, Knowledge (nature) +8, Listen +15, Move Silently +13, Ride +12, Search +13, Spot +15, Swim +7, Use Rope +8, Wilderness Lore +15; Combat Reflexes, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Mounted Combat, Run, Track.

{ } denotes manifested ability or statistic



DELVIN'S LAMENT (from page 149)

Longsword +3; intelligent (Int 14, Cha 13, Wis 17; lawful good; *locate evil* at will (radius of 25 miles), *bless* at will, *neutralize poison* at will, *protection from evil* at will, *globe of invulnerability* 3/day, *cure critical wounds* 1/day, *discern location* 1/week; ego 24); cursed (any creature who possesses this sword and who has killed or willfully caused harm to an innocent must make a Willpower save (DC 30) once per week or else lose a point of Wisdom due to reliving the mental anguish of that act; creatures so affected can not willingly give up the sword to another and likewise can not make use of the sword's other special abilities – it becomes a plain longsword so long as the individual so affected possesses it).

Priest of Teironnel, 5th-level cleric: SZ M (human); Hit Dice: 5d8 +10; hp 32; Init: +1 (Dex); Speed: 30; AC: 15 (+1 Dex, +4 scale mail); Atk: heavy mace +4 melee (1d8 +2); Reach: 5 x 5; Face: 5; Special attacks: Spells as 5th-level cleric; SV: Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +9; Abilities: Str 12, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 13; Skills: Concentration +10, Diplomacy +7, Knowledge: Arcana +9, Knowledge: Religion +13, Speak Language (any two) +8; Feats: Extend Spell, Heighten Spell, Iron Will; AL LG. Challenge rating: 6

SWORD OF THE FIGHTER (from page 150)

Longsword +2; Defending weapon allowing the wielder to transfer some or the sword's entire enhancement bonus to his AC. Speed weapon allowing the wielder one single extra attack each round at his highest bonus.

Androlanson, the Lich: SZ M (Undead); Hit Dice: 11d12 +3; hp: 121; Initiative: +3 (Dex); Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 21 (+3 Dex, +5 natural, +2 bracers of armor, +1 ring of protection); Atk: Touch +5 melee (or quarterstaff +5 melee, or dagger +5 melee); or masterwork light crossbow with masterwork bolts +10 ranged; Dmg: touch 1d8+5 and paralysis; quarterstaff 1d6, dagger 1d4; light crossbow 1d8; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.; Special Attacks: Damaging touch, fear aura, paralyzing touch, spells; Special Qualities: Undead, +4 turn resistance, damage reduction 15/+1, Immunities; AL NE; SV: Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +10 (cloak of resistance +1); Str 10, Dex 16, Con –, Int 19, Wis 14, Cha 13; Skills and Feats: Concentration +15, Hide +15, Knowledge (arcane) +18, Listen +15, Move silently +16, Scry +14, Search +16, Sense Motive +10, Spellcraft +18, Spot +15; Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item, Quicken Spell, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (Evocation), Still Spell, Toughness; magic items carried: +2 bracers of armor, +1 cloak of resistance, +1 ring of protection. Challenge rating: 13

SWORD OF THE BARBARIAN (from page 151)

The greatsword imparts a +1 to Strength, Constitution, Dexterity, and Wisdom. The sword negates any armor penalties and increases the wielder's AC by +2. The sword allows the wielder to perform an extra Barbarian Rage once a day. When used in the hands of a real barbarian, the sword increases the wielder's attack bonus by +4 and his Fort, Ref, and Will by +2.

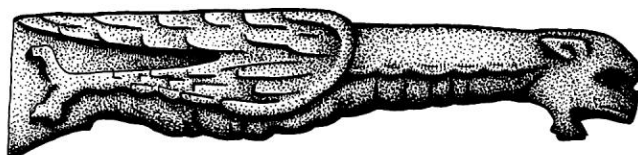
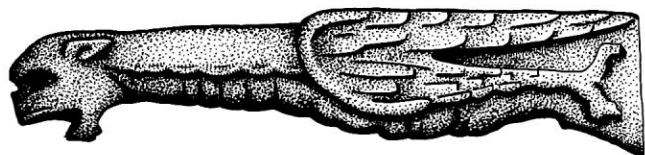
Mountain Tiger: SZ H (Animal); Hit Dice 8d8 +16; hp: 48; Speed: 40 ft.; AC: 17 (–1 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural); Atk: 2 Claws +6/+1 melee or slam +6 melee or bite +6 melee; Dmg: Claw 2d4 +5, slam 1d6 +5, bite 2d6 +5; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 10 ft. / 15 ft.; Special Attacks: Improved grab, pounce, rake 1d6 +5; Special Qualities: Scent; AL N; SV: Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +2; Str 22, Dex 18, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 7; Skills and Feats: Balance +8, Hide +5* (+4 in jungle), Jump +6, Listen +6, Move Silently +11, Spot +5; Treasure: None; Advancement: 9-16 HD.

PALADIN'S QUESTING SWORD (from page 152)

Greatsword +2/+4 versus undead; It's an intelligent, lawful good longsword with empathy. The wielder does not need to sleep or breathe. The wielder is given haste at need. The weapon's purpose is to Defeat/slay evil clerics. The weapon's ability scores are Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 16, Ego 13

Whitemoore Trueheart, 6th-level paladin: SZ M (Human); Hit Dice 5d10 +20; hp 62; Init: 3 (Dex); AC: 17 (+3 Dex, +4 chain shirt); Atk: Magical Longsword +8/+10 versus undead; Dmg: Magical longsword 1d8 +3/+5 versus undead 19-20/ x2 crit; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.; Special Abilities: Detect evil as the spell, Divine Grace, Lay on Hands, Divine Health, Aura of Courage, Smite Evil, Remove Disease, Turn Undead, Spells 1-1st; AL LG; SV: Fort +11, Ref +7, Will +8; Str 12, Dex 16, Con 18, Int 11, Wis 19, Cha 17; Skills and Feats: Concentration +12, Diplomacy +8, Profession (Guide) +12; Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Extra Turning.

Devon Heartsblood, 10th-level cleric: SZ M (Half-elf); Hit Dice: 10d8; hp 37; Init: +5 (Dex); AC: 21 (+1 Dex, +8 plate mail, +2 large shield); Atk: Heavy Flail +9/+4 melee; Dmg: Heavy Flail 1d10 +2 19-20/ x2 crit; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.; Special Qualities: Immunity to magic sleep, +2 save versus enchantment, low-light vision, elven blood; Special Attacks: Spells 7-0 level, 6-1st, 6-2nd, 5-3rd, 5-4th, 3-5th, turn undead; SV: Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +13, Str 15, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 9, Wis 18, Cha 19; Skills and Feats: Knowledge (arcane) +5, Spellcraft +6; Alertness, Combat Casting, Improved Initiative, Iron Will; AL LE.



SWORD OF THE RANGER (from page 153)

Longsword +3; The weapon adds +2 to all the wielder's saves. The weapon allows its wielder to fight with the next higher attack bonus level. The weapon gives the dragon's favored enemy information to its wielder. The weapon negates any armor penalties. The weapon doubles the base speed of the wielder when the blade is drawn.

Cebo, 7th-level dwarven cleric: SZ M (dwarf); Hit Dice: 7d8 +21; hp 57; Init: 3 (Dex); Speed: 15 ft. (scale mail); base 20 ft.; AC: 16 (+4 scale mail, +2 large shield); Atk: Dwarven war axe +5 melee; Dmg: War axe 1d10 +4; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5ft.; Special Attacks: Spells 7-0 level, 6-1st, 5-2nd, 4-3rd, 3-4th; Special Qualities: Dwarven traits; AL N; SV: Fort +10, Ref +5, Will +9; Str 17, Dex 17, Con 17, Int 17, Will 18, Cha 17; Skills and Feats: Concentration +13, Craft (armorsmithing) +13, Craft (weaponsmithing) +13, Knowledge (arcane) +13, Knowledge (religion) +13; Expertise, Great Fortitude, Toughness.

FEY SWORD OF THE BARD (from page 154)

Longsword +3; Allows the bard to cast spells two levels higher than he normally could. Allows the bard an attack bonus three levels higher than he would normally have. Increases the wielder's Charisma by +3

Preston, 10th-level Bard: SZ M (Human); Hit Dice: 10d6 + 20; hp 69; Init: +3 (Dex); Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 13 (+3 Dex); Atk: Enchanted longsword +12/+7 melee; Dmg: 1d8 +4 19-20/ x2 crit; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; Special Qualities: Bard traits, Spells 6-0 level, 4-1st, 4-2nd, 4-3rd, 2-5th; AL N; SV: Fort +5, Ref +10, Will +5; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 17, Wis 7, Cha 17; Skills and Feats: Craft (calligraphy) +16, Diplomacy +16, Escape Artist +16, Knowledge (nobility) +16, Move Silently +16, Perform +18, Sense Motive +11, Use Magic Device +16; Dodge, Focus (unarmed), Improved Unarmed Strike, Skill Focus (perform), Weapon Finesse (unarmed).

SWORD OF THE ROGUE (from page 155)

Short sword +1; The weapon adds +3 to all skills. The weapon allows the wielder to go invisible as the spell once a day. Grants the rogue the next highest Sneak Attack ability. Grants the wielder a +4 to his AC.

Seran-apt the Old White Dragon: SZ H (Dragon); Hit Dice: 24d12 +120; hp 380; Init: +0; Speed: 60 ft., flying 200 ft. (poor); AC: 31 (-2 size, +23 natural); Atk: Bite +31 melee, 2 claws +26, 2 wings +21, tail slap +16, crush +11; Dmg: Bite 2d8, claw 2d6, wing 1d8, tail slap 2d6, crush 2d8; Face/Reach: 10 ft. by 20 ft. / 10 ft.; Special Attacks:

Dragon Breathe 8d6 (DC 27); Special Abilities: Dragon traits, Fear DC 23, SR 21, Cold subtype, Fog cloud, Gust of wind, damage reduction 15/+2, spells as 5th-level sorcerer; AL CE; SV: Fort +19, Ref +14, Will +15; Str 29, Dex 10, Con 21, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 12; Skills and Feats: Listen +12, Search +12, Spellcraft +12, Spot +12; Alertness, Cleave (Claw), Power Attack, Weapon Focus (Bite).

BLADE OF THE SOUTH (from page 156)

Longsword +1; The jewels studding the sheath and guard of the blade have a total worth of 2,222,222 gold. The weapon has empathy, and its wielder has free use of Uncanny Dodge and Sunder. The neutral weapon has an Int of 10, Wis of 11, and Cha of 12, with an ego of 8.

The traps in and around the sword's resting place include the following, all repeated in every direction of the compass:

Poison Arrow Trap: CR +3, +11 ranged (2d6/x3 crit), poison as Green Blood Oil; Search (DC 21); Disable Device (DC 21).

Silver-Tipped Spear Trap: CR 3; +12 ranged (2d8/x3 crit); Search (DC 21); Disable Device (DC 21).

Shifting Pit Trap: The device is capable of being in four different locations, with a slide down to death. CR 2, no attack roll necessary (3d6); Reflex save (DC 21) avoids the danger; Search (DC 21); Disable Device (DC 21).

Closing Wall, Spiked Pit Trap: CR 5; no attack roll necessary (8d8), +10 melee (2d6 damage for 2d6 spikes per successful hit), Reflex save (DC 21) avoids, Search (DC 21); Disable Device (DC 21); when the trap is tripped, the walls close in, killing the trapped victim.

Poison Needle Wave: CR 7; +25 ranged (3d6 + poison as Green Blood Oil); Search (DC 23); Disable Device (DC 23).

Scything Magical Blade Trap: CR 8; +13 melee (3d8 /x4 crit); Search (DC 22); Disable Device (DC 22).

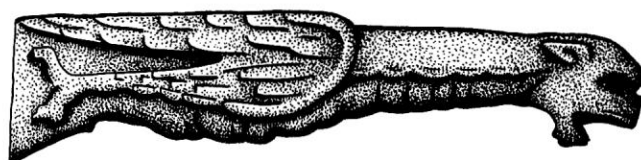
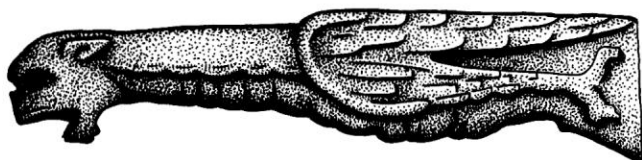
Crushing, Black Marble Block Trap: CR 7; +15 melee (8d6), Search (DC 21), Disable Device (DC 26).

Magical Net of Entanglement Trap: The net being used is an enchanted device. CR 3; +10 melee; Search (DC 21); Disable Device (DC 26).

Paralyzing Gas Trap: CR 11; no attack roll necessary, and the Fortitude check for the gas is (DC 17); Search (DC 22); Disable Device (DC 26).

BLADE OF THE NORTH (from page 157)

Longsword +1; the sword is made of mithril and will never break or need sharpening. The total worth of the metal is 1,111,111 gold pieces. The neutral weapon has speech, and its wielder has free use of Combat Reflexes and Mobility. The weapon has an Int of 11, Wis of 8, and Cha of 10, with an Ego of 3.



Allure, Female Elf Fighter 15th level: SZ M (Elf); Hit Dice: 15d10 +30, hp 114; Init: 8 (Dex, Improved Init); Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 14 (+4 Dex); Atk: +4 Longsword +23/+18/+13 melee; Dmg: Longsword +4 (1d8 +9/16-20/x3); Special Abilities: Elf traits; AL NG; SV: Fort +9, Ref +11, Will +5; Str 16, Dex 19, Con 14, Int 17, Will 10, Cha 20; Skills and Feats: Balance +9, Diplomacy +9, Jump +9, Perform +19, Sense Motive +9, Spot +9, Tumble +9, Use Magic Device +17; Ambidexterity, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Focus (longsword), Great Cleave, Improved Crit (longsword), Improved Crit (rapier), Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Run, Sunder, Toughness.

ELEMENTAL BLADE OF THE EAST (from page 158)

Longsword +2; The sword is made of the purest moon silver and will never break or need sharpening. The total worth of the metal is 777,777 gold pieces. The weapon has speech, and its wielder has free use of Sunder, Detect Secret Doors, and Detect Magic at will. The neutral weapon glows when orcs or goblins are within 50 yards of it. The weapon has an Int of 13, Wis of 9, and Cha of 11, with an ego of 7.

Invisible Stalker (4): SZ L (Elemental of Air); Hit Dice: 8d8 +16; hp 52; Init: +8; Speed: 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC: 17 (-1 size, +4 Dex, +4 natural); Atk: Slam +10/+5; Dmg: Slam 2d6 +6; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.; Special Qualities: Elemental, natural invisibility, improved tracking; AL N; SV: Fort +4, Ref +10, Will +4; Str 18, Dex 19, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 11; Skills and Feats: Listen +11, Move Silently +15, Search +11, Spot +13; Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (slam).

DWARVEN BLADE OF THE WEST (from page 159)

Bastard sword +4; the sword is made of the purest adamantite and will never break or need sharpening. The total worth of the metal is 999,999 gold pieces. The weapon has speech and telepathy and its wielder has *spider climb* for 20 minutes 1/day, *jump* for 20 minutes on wielder 1/day, *feather fall* on wielder 5/day, free use of evasion, *charm person* (DC 14) on contact 3/day, and *lightning bolt* (8d6 points of damage, 200 ft. range DC 16) once per day. The neutral weapon has a purpose to defeat/slay all foes of dwarves. It has a special purpose of +2 luck bonus to all saving throws, +2 deflection AC bonus, and spell resistance 15. The weapon has an Int of 16, Wis of 15, and Cha of 14, with an Ego of 27.

DRAGONKIND CITY BLADE (from page 160)

Rapier +4; Speech, Intelligence, wielder can *find traps* at will and *detect magic* at will. Wielder can *detect thoughts*. The purpose of the neutral blade is to defeat/slay foes of

the city of Dragonkind. The weapon gives a +2 luck bonus to all saving throws, +2 deflection AC bonus, and +1 Wisdom to all inhabitants fond of the city who are within a two-mile radius of the sword. The weapon has an Int of 16, Wis of 15, and Cha of 14, with an Ego of 7. The gods have suppressed this Ego so the wielder will be given advice but not be controlled by the power of the weapon.

TAKENEL, DWARVEN BLADE (from page 161)

Bastard sword +5; Adamantine blade that can never break and never needs sharpening. The sword uses empathy to communicate to the wielder, allows the wielder free use of Combat Reflexes and Mobility, gives the wielder *bull's strength*, its purpose is to defeat/slay arcane spell casters, spreads fear (DC 16) for 1d4 rounds on those it touches, increases the wielder's Constitution and Dexterity by +2, and has an Int of 16, Wis of 15, and Cha of 14, with an Ego of 26.

DAGGER OF BIRTHRIGHT (from page 162)

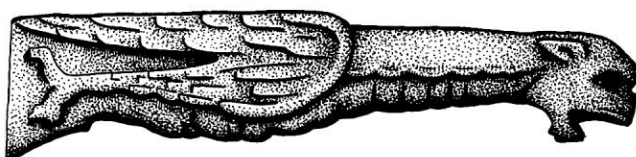
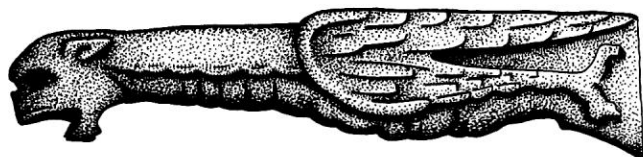
Dagger +3; *detect evil* 100' radius; *detect scrying* 50' radius; *detect (and cancel) invisibility* 50' radius; *detect undead* at 12th level of ability; *speak with animals* at will, 30 minute duration; *gem of seeing* embedded in pommel.

A wraith guards the passage leading to the prince's tomb.

Wraith: CR 5; SZ M (Undead); Hit Dice: 5d12; hp 40; Init: +7; AC: 15 (+3 Dex, +2 deflection); Atk: Incorporeal touch +5 melee (1d4 plus 1d6 permanent Con drain; AL LE; SV: Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +6; Special Abilities: Constitution drain, create spawn; Abilities: Str —, Dex 16, Con —, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 15; Skills Hide +11, Intimidate +10, Intuit Direction +6, Listen +12, Search +10, Sense Motive +8, Spot +12; Alertness, Blind-fight, Combat reflexes, Improved Initiative.

QUEEN'S SWORD OF LIGHT (from page 163)

Short Sword +3; Intelligent (Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 14; ego 11); the sword can determine the sex of the wielder and imposes a -5 penalty to all attacks made by a male attempting to use the sword (a safeguard to prevent men from harming the queen with her own sword); grasping the sword allows the queen (and only the queen) to gain the effects of goggles of night; when the sword is placed on the ground and a command word is spoken, the blade rotates to point toward Heddingsol regardless of distance; when the sword is plunged into the ground and a command word is spoken, the pommel emits a beacon of light straight up into the air as a signal of the sword's location, with the beam visible for two miles in any direction; heat metal on command with unlimited duration until cancelled.



Gruk, 3rd level Fighter: SZ M (human); Hit Dice 3d10; hp 27; Init: 5; AC: 21; Atk Longsword +7/+2 melee (1d8/19-20 x2 crit); SV: Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +2; Abilities: Str 15, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 10; Skills: Appraise +12, Bluff +8, Intimidate +8; Feats: Alertness, Great Fortitude; AL CG.

RAZOR'S EDGE (from page 164)

Dagger +3; adds +2 to initiative rolls when used in combat; improved critical hit potential - critical range 16-19, automatic on a natural 20, x3 damage multiplier. The dagger is also able to slice through any object with a hardness of 10 or less, but requires a Strength score behind it of at least twice that of the object's hardness. Thus, if someone wanted to slice something with a hardness of 8, he would have to have a Strength of at least 16 to do so else there would not be enough force behind the blade to cut all the way through.

TOOTH OF THE DRAGON (from page 165)

Dagger +2, +4 *versus dragons*, +6 *versus red dragons*; wielder can add his Fortitude bonus to all saving throws *versus dragon breath weapons*, and gains an additional +3 *versus red dragon breath (fire)*.

WIZARD REN'S KNIFE (from pages 166-167)

Dagger +3; the blade emits a red dragon breath once a day when fire is called upon (190 points of damage; DC 17 to save to half), summons a fire elemental once a day when fire is called upon, extinguishes any size fire or enchanted blaze by waving the weapon in front of the fire and saying, "Aflame." The blade makes the wielder impervious to all types of flames and heat damage. The wielder can summon a nightmare to serve him faithfully, and he can return the steed to the blade at will.

Nightmare: SZ L (Outsider); Hit Dice 6d8 +18; hp 60; Init: +6; Speed: 40 ft., fly 90 ft. (good); AC: 24 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +13 natural); Atk: 2 hooves +9 melee, bite +4 melee; Dmg: Hoof 1d8 +4 and 1d4 fire, bite 1d8 +2; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 10 ft./5 ft.; Special Attacks: Flaming hooves, smoke; Special Qualities: Astral projection, etherealness; AL NE; SV: Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +6; Str 18, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 12; Skills and Feats: Intuit Direction +10, Listen +12, Move Silently +11, Search +10, Sense Motive +10, Spot +12; Alertness, Improved Initiative.

Vocater the Ghaele Eladrin: SZ M (Outsider); Hit Dice: 10d8 +20; hp 90; Init: +5; Speed: 50 ft., fly 150 ft. (perfect); AC: 25 (+1 Dex, +14 natural); Atk: +4 greatsword +21/+16 melee; or 2 light rays +11 ranged touch; Dmg: +4 Greatsword 2d6 +14 and positive energy; light ray 2d12; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; Special Attacks: Spell-like

abilities, spells, gaze, positive energy; Special Qualities: Damage reduction 25/+3, SR 28, celestial qualities, alternate form; SV Fort +9, Ref +8, Will +10; Str 25, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 17, Wis 16, Cha 16; Skills and Feats: Animal Empathy +13, Concentration +12, Escape Artist +11, Hide +11, Knowledge (arcane) +13, Listen +15, Move Silently +11, Sense Motive +13, Spot +15; Alertness, Blind-fight, Improved Initiative; AL CG.

SORCERER ATUM-SET'S KNIFE (from pages 168-169)

Dagger +2; Empathy, and the wielder does not need to sleep. Also, the wielder can see invisible objects at will. The knife blade performs a *feeblemind* attack with each successful cut. On a command word, the flat edge of the blade acts like a *Mirror of Life Trapping*.

Atum-Set 19th-level Sorcerer: SZ M (Human); Hit Dice: 19d4 +38; hp 81; Init: 8; Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 14 (+4 Dex); Atk: +3 Short spear +9/+4, light crossbow +13/+8; Dmg: Short spear 1d8 +3 x3 crit, light crossbow 1d8 19-20/x2 crit; Special Attacks: Spells 6-0 level, 7-1st, 7-2nd, 7-3rd, 6-4th, 6-5th, 6-6th; AL LE; SV: Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +11; Str 11, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 16; Skills and Feats: Alchemy +25, Concentration +24, Craft (painting) +25, Knowledge (arcana) +25, Profession (scribe) +22, Spellcraft +25; Alertness, Blind-fight, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Unarmed Combat, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike.

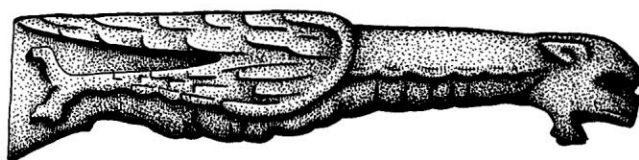
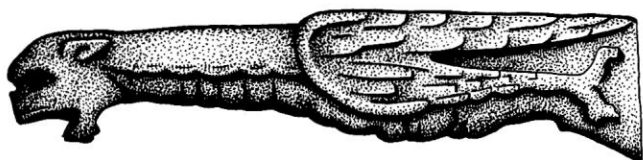
NAUGDA, DAGGER OF RAA'PAAR (from pages 170-171)

Dagger +2; intelligent, lawful evil weapon, (Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8, Ego 17); neutral evil; *invisibility* at will, 2-hour duration; *detect invisibility* 20' radius; *detect good* at 10th-level ability; *detect poison* at 10th-level ability; *detect secret doors* at 10th-level ability; wielder may move silently except for willful noises (e.g., speech) or collateral noises (e.g., knocking over an item); cursed (anyone using the dagger who has human blood suffers a -5 penalty to all attacks and a -8 penalty to attacks that may be a killing blow).

Gruenab, Hill Giant, 7th-Level Fighter: SZ L (hill giant); Hit Dice: 12d8 +48; hit points 98; Init: -1; AC: 20; Atk: Huge greatclub +16/+11 melee (2d6 +10); AL NE; SV: Fort +12, Ref +3, Will +4; Special Abilities: Rock throwing, rock catching; Abilities: Str 25, Dex 8, Con 19, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 17; Skills and Feats: Climb +9, Jump +9, Spot +4; Cleave, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (greatclub).

ARCHIBALD'S DAGGER OF WATER AND AIR (from pages 172-173)

Dagger +3; *water breathing* at will, unlimited duration;



Speak with animals (underwater creatures only) at will, unlimited duration; *freedom of movement* underwater; allows air breathing for creatures who normally breathe water; telepathy for up to four creatures in contact with the dagger or sheath (dagger and sheath must be within 10 feet of each other).

Archibald carries the dagger at all times when away from home, and stores it in a special niche in his house when he is there. He will not consider trading the dagger unless offered an incredible object in exchange, and such an object must serve his lifestyle underwater or his infrequent visits to the mainland. Archibald does not have much need for money, so will not sell the dagger, but he might be convinced to enchant a similar blade if offered a ridiculous sum of gold or gems.

Some of the enchantments on the blade were cast by Archibald's merfolk friends and are unknown to surface dwellers.

Archibald, 14th level Wizard: SZ M (human); Hit Dice: 14d4; hp 40; Init: +7; AC: 19; Atk: Dagger +7/+2 melee (1d4/19-20 x2 crit) or Quarterstaff +8/+3 melee; SV: Fort +4 (+6), Ref +4 (+6), Will +9; Special Abilities: Spells: 4-0 level, 6-1st level, 5-2nd level, 5-3rd level, 5-4th level, 4-5th level, 3-6th level, 2-7th level; Abilities: Str 12, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 15, Cha 12; Skills Alchemy +17, Concentration +17, Craft +17, Gather Information +7, Handle Animal +7, Hide +7, Intuit Direction +7, Knowledge (Arcana) +17, Knowledge (Nature) +17, Profession +17, Scry +17, Spellcraft +17, Swim, +7; Feats: Alertness, Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Enlarge Spell, Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes, Quicken Spell; AL CG.

ADDER'S FANG (from pages 174-175)

Dagger +2, Silent Shadow (wielder gains +10 circumstance bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks); intelligent (Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 13; empathy; neutral evil; wielder uses Death Attack with altered Fortitude save [DC 10 + twice assassin's class level + Intelligence modifier], wielder does not need to sleep; defeat/kill drow elves, freedom of movement; ego 15); cursed (requirement: Assassin prestige class).

Jevan the Calm, Half-Drow Elf Lycanthrope (Wererat), 12th-Level Rogue/7th-Level Assassin: SZ M (Half-elf); Hit Dice: 19d6; hp 101; Init: 8 {11}; AC: 14 {17}; Atk: dagger +16/+11/+6 {+21/+16/+11} melee (1d4+2/ 19-20 x2 crit), dagger +18/+13/+8 {+21/+16/+11} thrown (1d4+2/ 19-20 x2 crit); AL CE; SV: Fort +10 {+11}, Ref +17 {+20}, Will +10, Special Abilities: Spells: 3-1st level, 2-2nd level, 2-3rd level, Drow Half-elfin traits, Evasion, Slippery Mind, Sneak Attack +6d6, Death Attack, Poison Use,

Uncanny Dodge, Rat Empathy, {Curse of Lycanthropy (rat)}, Alternate Form (dire rat or hybrid), {Damage Reduction 15/silver}, {Scent}; Abilities: Str 15, Dex 19 {25}, Con 15 {17}, Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 19; Skills and Feats: Appraise +7, Balance +13 {+16}, Bluff +8, Climb +16 {+21}, Disable Device +12, Disguise +18, Escape Artist +13 {+16}, Forgery +7, Gather Information +13, Hide +18 {+21}, Innuendo +6, Intimidate +8, Jump +6, Knowledge (local) +5, Listen +13 {+17}, Move Silently +18 {+21}, Open Lock +13 {+16}, Pick Pocket +8 {+11}, Read Lips +7, Search +9 {+13}, Sense Motive +6, Spot +13 {+17}, Tumble +8 {+11}, Use Magic Device +8, Use Rope +8 {+11}; Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Control Shape, Improved Initiative, Mobility, {Multiattack}, Run, spring Attack, {Weapon Finesse (dagger)}, {Weapon Finesse (bite)}.

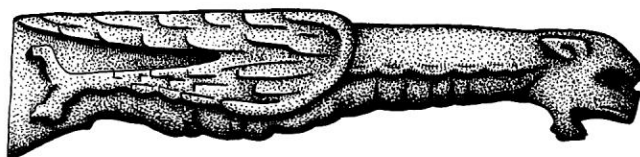
{ } denotes ability or statistic while in dire rat/hybrid form.

Jade Adder, Human 13th-Level Rogue/5th-Level

Assassin: SZ M (Human); Hit Dice: 18d6; hp 106; Init: 9; AC: 17; Atk: Adder's Fang +19/+14/+9 melee (1d4+3/ 17-20 x2 crit), dagger +17/+12/+7 thrown (1d4+1/ 17-20 x2 crit); AL LE; SV: Fort +6, Ref +17, Will +5, Special Abilities: Spells: 2-1st level, 2-2nd level, Evasion, Improved Evasion, Defensive Roll, Sneak Attack +7d6, Death Attack, Poison Use, Uncanny Dodge; Abilities: Str 13, Dex 20, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 14; Skills and Feats: Appraise +7, Balance +17, Bluff +9, Climb +16, Disable Device +9, Disguise +6, Escape Artist +13, Forgery +9, Gather Information +9, Hide +27, Innuendo +5, Intimidate +6, Jump +5, Knowledge (local) +3, Listen +17, Move Silently +27, Open Lock +17, Pick Pocket +17, Read Lips +9, Search +9, Sense Motive +7, Spot +17, Tumble +17, Use Magic Device +4, Use Rope +7; Blind-Fight, Dodge, Improved Critical (dagger), Improved Initiative, Mobility, Quick Draw, spring Attack, Weapon Finesse (dagger).

DUCHESS' DAGGER (from page 176)

Dagger +2, +4 against hated opponents. The owner is subtly cursed and gradually becomes unable to hold back his true feelings. The character's ability to 'hold his tongue' slips away. After a week, the owner cannot help but occasionally speak his mind. After two, he can almost do nothing but speak his mind. After three weeks, the trend turns violent; the owner is compelled to use the dagger against any authority figure who he feels is incompetent or otherwise undeserving. Make a Will (DC 18) on each incident to avoid taking such negative actions.



THIEF'S KNIFE (from page 177)

Dagger +1; Grants the wielder the following skills at +6 or increases those skills by +6: Balance, Disable Device, Escape Artist, Open Lock, Pick Pocket, and Spot. The neutral blade is a talking weapon with Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 14, and Ego 17.

Buckler of Storing +2; At a command word, anything weighting less than 50 pounds can be stored in a pocket dimension on the back of the buckler. The enchantment of the buckler also gives the user these Feats: Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, and Run.

Cloak of the Beloved Son +3; The cloak gives all of the abilities and skills of the last person to wear it. At the moment, the last wearer was a 10th-level fighter with these Feats: Power Attack, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Sunder, Great Cleave, and Quick Draw. The cloak also adds +3 to all DC checks.

HEARTSTOPPER (from page 178)

Dagger +3; Gives the wielder the following Feats: Blind-fight, Combat Reflexes, Improved Critical with this knife, and Point Blank Shot with Precise Shot. When thrown, the weapon can magically travel up to 100 feet and still be treated as a short-range attack. After striking, it returns to the hand of the caster.

KRUMMEL'S ECCENTRIC DAGGER (from page 179)

Dagger +2; intelligent (Int 17, Wis 10, Cha 11; ego 17; speech, including laughing and singing; chaotic good); *detect secret doors* 50' radius; *find traps* 50' radius; *detect magic* 100' radius; *detect evil* 100' radius; *detect invisibility* 50' radius; identifies extra dimensional spaces within 50 feet; *light* at will, unlimited duration; when held on an open palm and a command word is spoken, the dagger will always rotate to point north, whether indoors or out.

Krummel's Eccentric Dagger has a mind of its own. When stored away, the dagger remains quiet, but in combat, the dagger laughs at the enemy and calls advice to its wielder. During meals and at other times of its choosing (under a full moon, perhaps, or during holidays), the dagger sings soothing, pleasant ballads or amusing tunes. It is known for wisecracking. It also offers unsolicited advice at times, such as telling its wielder to turn left at a fork in the road. The dagger's advice is only about 75 percent accurate, so its user must take care in following its advice.

It is likely that the dagger will manifest other powers in the future, depending on situations that arise.

DAGGERS OF RHYLINGVALE (from page 180)

Dagger +2; *invisibility* at will, unlimited duration; *cat's grace* at will at 10th level of ability; *confusion* at will (DC 16) for 3–12 rounds; *heat metal* on the blade only, at will, duration 4 hours; *pass without trace* duration permanent; wielder gains one extra attack per round.

The three daggers lie at the bottom of a crevasse, amid the remains of the traveling party that was lost in the snow. The daggers and other items lie undisturbed, but a pair of winter wolves makes its lair nearby. The remains of the party will be impossible to find in winter, with the best chance of reaching the site occurring in late summer.

Winter Wolves (2): SZ L; Hit Dice: 6d10+18; hp 66, 51; Init: +5; Spd: 50 ft.; AC: 15; Atk: Bite +9 melee; Face 5' x 10'; Reach 5'; SV: Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 18, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 13, Cha 10; Skills Hide +6, Listen +9, Move Silently +7, Spot +9, Wilderness Lore +1; Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative; AL NE.

Challenge Rating: 5.

FRIZ, DAGGER OF THE WHITE DRAGON (from page 181)

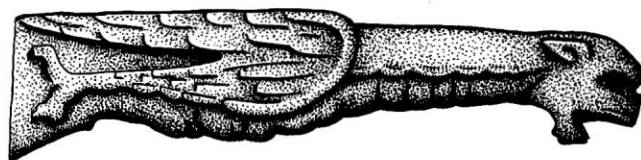
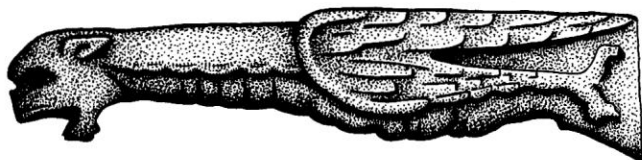
Dagger +1; radiates constant cold causing 1-2 hit points damage to any who touch it (undead and naturally cold creatures such as white dragons are immune); blade never grows dull; when placed in a container or chest no larger than 2' by 2' by 2', the container maintains a constant temperature of about 40 degrees for as long as the dagger remains within; dagger can freeze up to one gallon of liquid or solid in approximately 15 minutes (depending on room conditions and temperature of the liquid); glows faintly for 24 hours before the arrival of any storm bringing snow, with stronger storms causing a brighter glow.

FINNARD'S BACKBITER (from page 182)

Dagger +3; the blade gives any rogue or assassin character an addition +1d6 to any sneak attack rolls; the wielder gains the special ability crippling strike regardless of their experience level, and does an additional +1 point of Strength damage on a successful strike.

BLADE OF THE HUNTER (from page 183)

Dagger +4; wielder can never get lost, always knows which way is north; gains a +2 bonus to the following skills in a wilderness environment: hide, search, spot, listen, intuit direction, and jump; gains +5 levels in wilderness lore. The blade can be used by anyone, but those who have kept it over the years have mostly been rangers or druids. Hence, tales are told that the weapon will only function for someone of that profession; this is not true.



THE DEVOURER (from page 184)

Dagger +4; possesses life-stealing abilities. The knife's wielder gains 1 hit point for every 2 points of damage done to opponents, not to exceed the wielder's maximum; however, every 12 hours the blade drains 1d4+2 hit points from the wielder to feed its power. The blade and the wielder are linked until one or the other is destroyed, which is usually the possessor. If the wielder throws the cursed blade away, the drain continues until he or she is dead. Only the use of a wish or limited wish can separate one from the other.

GLOOMWING (from page 185)

Dagger +4, *Nondetection* (weapon and wielder cannot be detected by divination spells or magic items); intelligent (Int 17, Wis 10, Cha 21; speech, telepathy; *read magic* and all languages; neutral evil; wielder has *darkvision* that can see through magical darkness at will, *deeper darkness* 3/day, wielder has free use of Improved Initiative, *shadow walk* 1/day, *Shadow Jump* as per lvl 10 Shadowdancer; find and destroy *Glimmerwing*, spell resistance 25; Ego 27); cursed (drawback: wielder suffers -2 penalty to all actions taken in direct sunlight).

HAWKEYE (from page 186)

Dagger +3, *Farseer* (wielder is affected by a continuous true seeing spell and gains a +5 bonus to Spot and Search); intelligent (Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 10; semiempathy; chaotic good; *hypnotism* at will, wielder has free use of Improved Critical (dagger), scrying 1/day; Ego 11).

Ygglothysa the Aboleth: CR10; SZ H (aberration, aquatic); Hit Dice: 15d8+75; hp 143; Init: +1 (Dex); Spd: 10, swim 60; AC 16 (-2 size, +1 Dex, +7 natural); Atk: 4 tentacles +19 (1d6+9 and transformation) melee; Face 10' x 20'; Reach 10'; AL LE; SV Fort +12, Ref +6, Will +14; Str 26, Dex 12, Con 20, Int 15, Wis 17, Cha 17; Skills and Feats: Concentration +20, Knowledge (local) +7, Listen +20, Spot +20; Alertness, Combat Casting, Great Fortitude, Iron Will.

FROSTBLESSING (from page 187)

Dagger +3, *Chill Ally* (wielder is considered to be a Cold-type creature and heals 1 hp per round while his flesh is in contact with snow or ice); intelligent (Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 11; empathy; neutral; sleet storm 3/day, wielder can summon and command a Huge frost worm 1/week if in cold lands; defend the servants and interests of Lady Cold, *hold monster* [DC 20] for 2d3 rounds; ego 16); cursed (requirement: blade must be cleaned with snow within a day of being used or it ceases to function until it is cleaned).

Frost Worm: CR 12; SZ H (magical beast, cold); Hit Dice: 14d10 +20; hp 147; Init: +4; Speed 30ft., burrow 10 ft.; AC: 18 (-2 size, +10 natural); Attacks: Bite +20 melee; Dmg: Bite 2d6 +12 and 1d8 cold; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 40 ft./10 ft.; Special Attacks: Trill, cold, breath weapon; Special Qualities: Cold subtype, death throes; AL N; SV: Fort +14, Ref +9, Will +6; Str 26, Dex 10, Con 20, Int 3, Wis 11, Cha 5; Skills and Feats: Hide +3, Listen +5, Spot +4; Alertness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will.

THAVING TOR (from page 188)

Dagger +3, defending, spell storing, wounding; neutral blade, intelligent (Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 17, Ego 19, semi-empathy, item can sense motive, wielder has free use of uncanny dodge); cursed (owner becomes selfishly possessive about the item).

Thaving Tor is sought by two different groups of people—the goblins of the Icecrushers and Pilding Braceworthy, gnome of Blandvil. Its possessor will not yield it without fighting, and he has arranged his home to ensure that no one can get to him without his becoming aware of the intrusion. Game masters should be creative here.

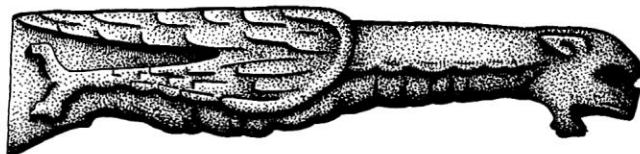
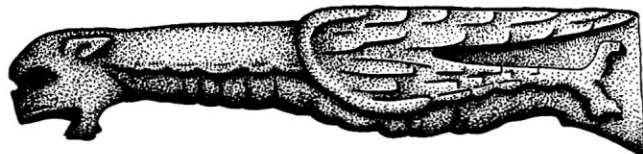
Goblins of the Icecrushers (50): CR 6; SZ S (Goblinoid); Hit Dice: 1d8; hp 4x15; Init: +1; Spd: 30; AC 15 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +3 studded leather); Atk: Morningstar +1 (1d8-1); or javelin +3 (1d6-1) ranged; Face 5' x 5'; Reach 5'; Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft.; AL NE; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 8, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 8; Skills and Feats: Hide +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +3; Alertness.

Pilding Braceworthy, Gnome of Blandvil, 6th-Level

Rogue: SZ S (Gnome); Hit Dice 6d6; hp 50; Init 4; AC 15; Atk: Gnome hammer MW: +3/+6 melee (1d6+1/x3/x4 crit); AL CN; SV: Fort +6; Ref +9; Will +3; Str 15, Dex 18, Con 19, Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 11; Special Abilities: Gnome abilities, rogue abilities; Skills and Feats: Bluff +8, Climb +10, Disable Device +12, Escape Artist +13, Forgery +11, Gather Information +9, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Pickpocket +11, Sense Motive +7, Spot +7, Use Magic Device +9, Craft (calligraphy) +10, Speak Dwarven, Speak Goblin; Ambidexterity, Point-Blank Shot, Precise Shot.

Kerrick Kerrickson, 4th-Level Rogue: SZ M (Human);

Hit Dice 4d6; hp 26; Init 3; AC 13; Atk: Dagger MW: +3/+2 (1d4-1/19-20x2 crit); AL CG; SV Fort +3; Ref +7; Will +3; Str 15, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 16, Cha 11; Special Abilities: Rogue abilities; Skills and Feats: Alchemy +6.5, Bluff +9, Disguise +8, Escape Artist +10, Forgery +10, Gather Information +8, Hide +11, Innuendo +9, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Listen +8, Move Silently +9,



Use Magic Device +6, Profession (apothecary) +6; Ambidexterity, Combat Reflexes, Skill Focus (hide).

HRASTOK (from page 189)

Dagger +4 if used by a rogue, +2 dagger for any other class, keen, chaotic; cannot be wielded by a lawful person (should a lawful person attempt to use it, the player should roll d100; if that roll is 25+, the possessor becomes chaotic and must abandon his current class and become a rogue); grants wielder access to the Travel and Trickery realms at level; when used in combat, increases owner's effective Dex to 18.

Eisland and Narvik are cold, rugged places; the people who live there are the crusty, difficult, not very friendly, and difficult-to-get-to-know types, and despite what they'll say about Staal (uniformly negative), a game master should not play them as helpful to any PCs. Staal may be a bastard, but he is their bastard, and they'll defend him, if they can.

Staal Trantar, 7th-Level Rogue: SZ M (Human), Hit Dice 7d6; hp 44; Init 4; AC 14; Atk: Dagger: +7/+6 melee (1d4+1/19-20x2 crit); AL CN; SV: Fort +6; Ref +11; Will +4; Str 16, Dex 18, Con 18, Int 9, Wis 19, Cha 17; Special Abilities: Rogue abilities; Skills and Feats: Appraise +6, Balance +8, Climb +7, Gather Information +7, Handle Animal +3.5, Hide +7, Intimidate +10, Intuit Direction +9, Knowledge (religion) +4, Listen +10, Move Silently +9, Open Lock +9, Search +5, Tumble +9, Profession (sailor) +6; Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes.

SACRED KNIFE OF THE RAINBOW (from page 190)

Holy +1 dagger of speed; intelligent (Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 12; Speech; Neutral Good; true seeing at will, wielder has free use of uncanny dodge (as a 5th-level barbarian); defend/protect the servants and interests of Eshra, Eshra's Bow (prismatic spray [DC 17], does not require a successful hit to use but may only be used in pursuance of the knife's Special Purpose, 1/day); Ego 15); cursed (requirement: wielder must be a servant of Eshra).

DAGGER OF FALLEN HEROES (from page 191)

Flaming dagger +3; intelligent (Int 13, Wis, 10, Cha 15; empathy; chaotic evil; cure light wounds (1d8+5) on wielder 1/day, passwall at will; Ego 10); cursed (drawback: character becomes selfishly possessive about item; requirement: character must sacrifice [destroy] 100 gp worth of valuables per day).

Geran the Wraith, female 8th-Level Rogue: CR 8; SZ Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 8d6; hp 33; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (touch

13, flat-footed 18 [+3 Dex, +3 armor, +1 enhancement, +1 natural armor]); Atk +11/+6 melee (1d4+5 plus 1d6 fire/19-20, dagger of fallen heroes), +11/+6 ranged (1d4/19-20, masterwork hand crossbow with masterwork bolts); SA Sneak attack +4d6; SQ Evasion, leadership qualities, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked); AL CE; SV Fort +5, Ref +10, Will +2; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 9, Cha 15. Height 5 ft. 6 in., weight 137 lbs.; Skills and Feats: Appraise +10, Bluff +10, Climb +10, Disable Device +10 (+12), Gather Information +10, Hide +11, Intimidate +12, Listen +10, Move Silently +11, Open Lock +11 (+13), Search +8, Sense Motive +7, Spot +9, Tumble +11, Use Magic Device +10; Alertness, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Leadership. Special Qualities: Leadership qualities: cohort (Karu), 5 1st-level human rogue followers. Possessions: +1 studded leather, masterwork hand crossbow, 20 masterwork bolts, masterwork thieves' tools, potion of cure moderate wounds, potion of firebreath, potion of protection from elements (cold), cloak of resistance +1, amulet of natural armor +1.

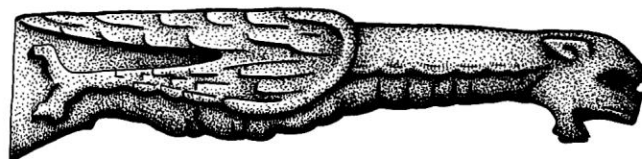
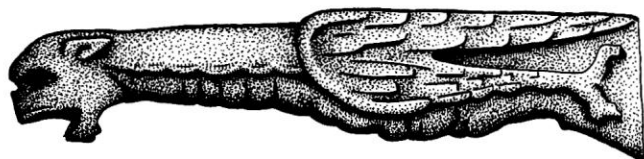
Karu, human male 6th-Level Rogue: CR 6; SZ: Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 6d6+12; hp 42; Init +4 (+4 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (touch 14, flat-footed 17 [+4 Dex, +3 armor]); Atk +8 melee (1d8+4 plus 1d6 cold, +1 heavy mace of frost); SA Sneak attack +3d6; SQ Evasion, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked); AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +9, Will +3; Str 16, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 7, Wis 13, Cha 14. Height 5 ft., 8 in., weight 170 lbs.; Skills and Feats: Appraise +7, Bluff +11, Diplomacy +15, Gather Information +11, Listen +10, Move Silently +13, Sense Motive +10; Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Mobility, spring Attack. Possessions: Masterwork studded leather, +1 heavy mace of frost, potion of alter self, potion of darkvision, Heward's handy haversack.

Followers, human 1st-Level Rogue (5): CR 1, SZ:

Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 1D6 +1; hp 3, 4, 5, 5, 6; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (touch 12, flat-footed 12 [+2 Dex, +2 armor]), Atk +2 melee (1d4/19-20, dagger); SA Sneak attack +1d6; AL N; SV Fort +1, Ref +4, Will -1; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 10; Skills and Feats: Bluff +4, Climb +1, Gather Information +4, Hide +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +8, Pick Pocket +6, Search +4, Spot +3; Skill Focus (move silently), Weapon Finesse (dagger). Possessions: leather armor, dagger.

BLADE OF HARBOKEN (from page 192)

Kukri +2, +5 vs. elves and half-elves; enervation (only affects elves and half-elves who touch or are struck by the blade); all intelligent non-elf creatures who pick up the weapon must make a Willpower save (DC 30) or else fall under the spell of the blade; those under the blade's spell



must keep it on his or her person at all times; additionally, those under its spell must make a Willpower save once per day (DC 20) or else be compelled to kill an elf or half-elf with the weapon within 24 hours – the owner must make a Willpower save (DC 25) each time he sees a possible target or else immediately attack that target, whether or not he wants to; for each day that a person under the blade's spell does not kill an elf/half-elf while compelled to do so, he will lose one point of Constitution and Wisdom (temporary, all lost points return once a kill is made); a person under the blade's spell will not willingly give up the blade to anyone – it must be taken by force or while the person is unconscious; a person under the blade's spell who loses the weapon must make a Willpower save (DC 30) or else do anything and everything within his power to get the weapon back – this DC is reduced by 1 for every 12 hours that the weapon is outside of his possession and a person who makes this save check will act normally again (though he will know everything that he did while under the weapon's spell).

Welin, 12th-Level Wizard: SZ M (elf); Hit Dice: 12d4 +24; hp 48; Init: +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Speed: 30; AC: 21 (+3 Dex, +4 ring, +4 talisman); Atk: dagger +3, +10 melee (1d4 +4); Reach: 5 x 5; Face: 5; Special Qualities: spells as 12th-level wizard; SV: Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +10; Abilities: Str 13, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 19, Wis 15, Cha 11; Skills: Alchemy +12, Concentration +14, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Listen +14, Move Silently +13, Speak Language (any 3) +12, Spot +16; Feats: Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Improved Initiative; AL LN. Challenge rating: 14

KEEPER KNIFE (from page 193)

Dagger +1, Dancing thief hunter knife. This knife acts like a dancing knife whenever someone steals from its owner. The knife unerringly senses who and where the thief is, and attacks relentlessly. Unlike a normal dancing weapon, the keeper knife will travel away from its owner's side, for miles, if necessary at a speed of 90 feet. The dancing effect is continuous once begun until the target is reduced to below zero hit points.

When the thief has fewer than zero hit points, it flies back to its owner. Even upon its return, it can still unerringly find the original thief, until that thief dies or another person steals from the knife's owner, setting the knife off again after a new target. For creatures with damage reduction or regeneration, this could mean that the knife is gone for a very long time.

A keeper knife can only be given away, sold, or removed from the dead body of its previous owner. It can never be taken against its owner's will.

SHARKHUNTER (from page 194)

Dagger +2, shark confusion. The sharkhunter knife gives its bearer *freedom of movement* and *water breathing* spell-like abilities for as long as the knife is brandished. The five circles in its blade grant the *water breathing* spell five times a day for 8 hours to anyone the bearer wishes.

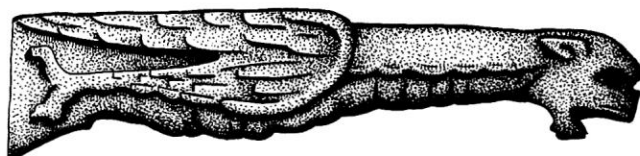
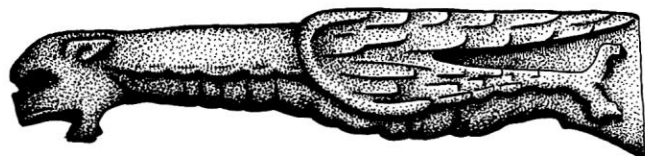
In addition, any time a shark is struck by the knife, the shark must immediately make a Will saving throw (DC 19). If it fails, the shark is affected by a confusion spell as if cast by a 15th level sorcerer. On a roll of 7-10, instead of attacking the nearest character, or acting normally, the shark attacks the nearest sahuagin. If there are no sahuagin nearby, the shark wanders away for one minute, as if the character had rolled a 1 on the confusion table. When the spell runs out, because either the knife bearer attacks the shark or the duration ends, the sharks revert to their normal state. If provoked, they attack PCs as a shark normally would.

If the shark attacked is found in the company of sahuagin, and has been trained by them, the training is completely erased from the shark's mind. It becomes a normal shark, with no affinity for sahuagins or any other creature.

RAINBOW KNIFE (from page 195)

Dagger +2, ghost touch, wounding, intelligent (Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 7; semiempathy, chaotic evil; wielder can see invisible at will; Ego 6); cursed (once drawn, the weapon must "draw blood" before being sheathed or its wielder dies)

Kesh the Sea Wraith: Sz M (Incorporeal), Hit Dice: 5d12 (36 hp); Init +8; Spd: swim 30, fly 60 (clumsy); AC 16; Attacks: Incorporeal Touch +5 melee, Knife +7 melee (1d4+2); Face 5' x 5'; Reach 5'; AL LE; SV: Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +6; Abilities: Str —, Dex 18; Con —; Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 12; Skills and Feats: Hide +12, Intimidate +9, Intuit Direction +7, Sense Motive +9, Spot +13; Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative.



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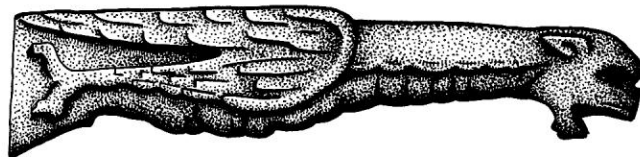
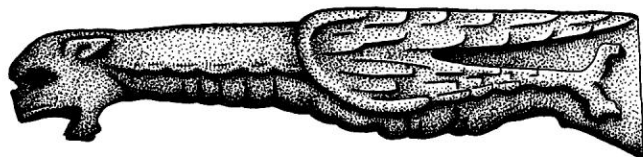
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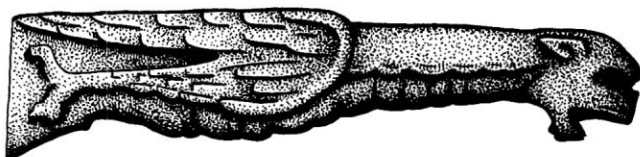
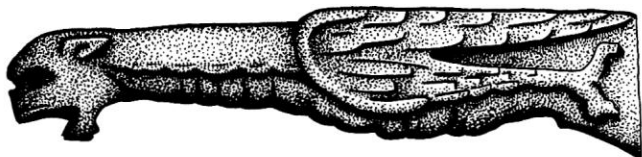
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Swords of Power

Swords of Power is a d20 System product detailing enchanted swords of amazing magical power. Far more than just a listing of swords, this book details in storyteller form the people, monsters, places, and conditions where the swords are used or hidden. Full scale replicas of all of the enchanted swords in this book can be purchased online at our website: www.fastforwardgames.com.



About the Authors:

James M. Ward, Timothy Brown, and Lester Smith, the core of Fast Forward's masterful and award-winning design team. They use a storyteller format to present original gaming details and stats for these unique magical swords. With additional design from Anne Brown, Jonathan Cassie, Dan Grendell, Chris Hartford, Kevin Melka, David Lyons, Michelle Lyons, Jeff Quick, and Chris Trossen, *Swords of Power* presents never before seen enchanting stories with magical swords suitable for any fantasy campaign world.

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- * Each blade is listed in two formats. The first format is a creative story packed with details allowing the referee to get some idea of the history or interest the blade has created in the world at large. The second listing at the back of the book provides complete d20 details on the weapon and often its guardians, pursuers, and other magic protection surrounding the sword at its present location.
- * Beautiful illustrations of every sword, dagger, and knife. Each rendering is an accurate depiction of the original magical weapon and true to the painstakingly accurate replicas.



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